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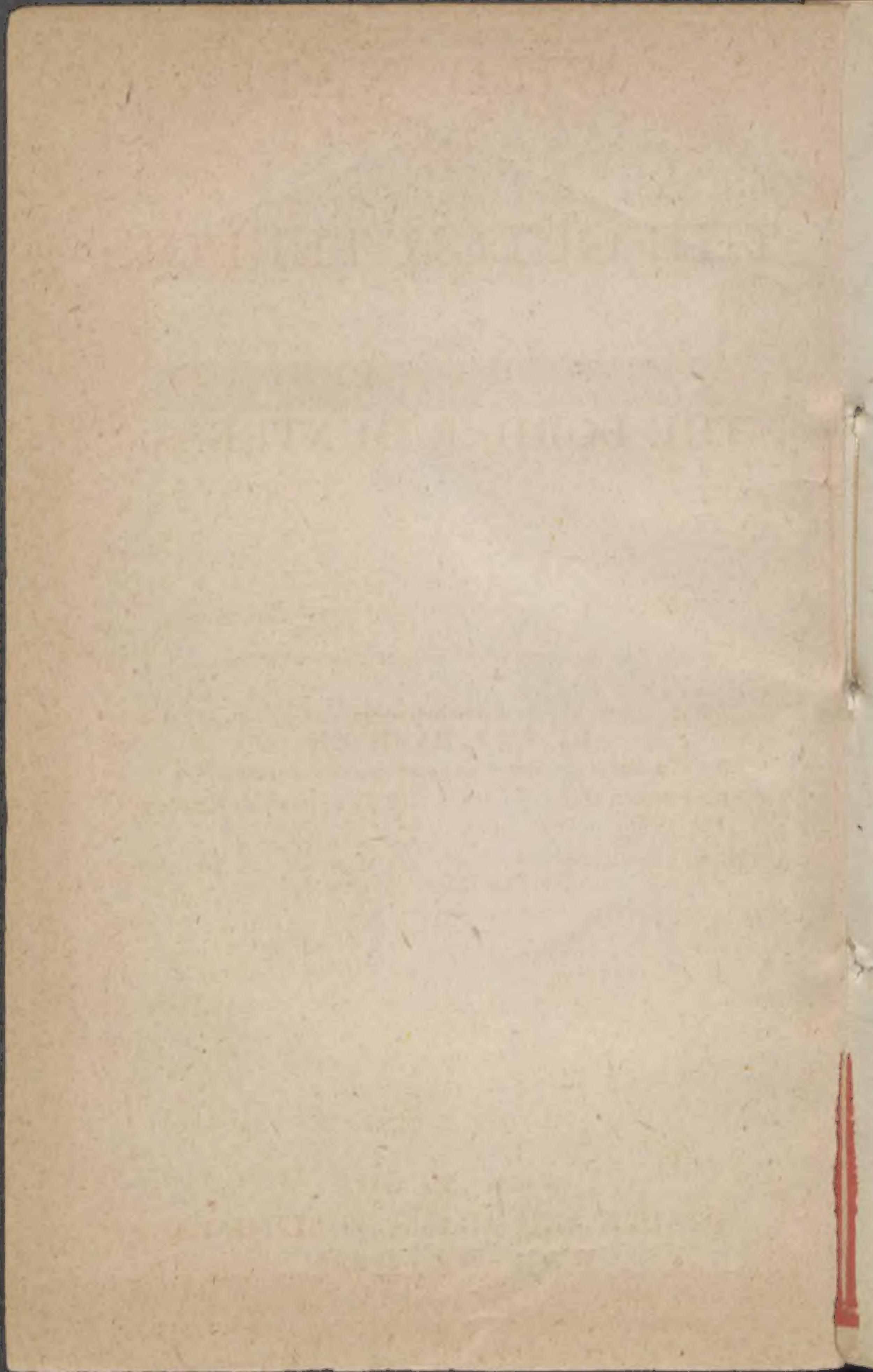
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POCKET NOVELS



Wild Nat, the Gulch Terror.





WILD NAT,

THE GULCH TERROR;

OR,

THE BORDER HUNTRESS.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

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WILD NAT, THE GULCH TERROR.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOUNDED PAWNEE.

AMONG the foothills of the West, the land of the buffalo, the grizzly and the Indian, the land of wild adventures and savage deeds. A footstep stirs the forest leaves, and a clear voice breaks out in a wild song—a voice rich, full and ringing:

"No, for I am a hero's child ;
I'll hunt my quarry in the wild ;
And still my home this mansion make,
Of all unheeded and unheeding,
And cherish for my warrior's sake—
The flower of love lies bleeding."

As the last words were yet ringing through the mountains, a canopy of leaves was thrust aside, and a beautiful girl sprung out into the open space. A glorious woman, worthy of the devotion of man. Her dark hair, lustrous, black as night, rolled in great masses, unconfined, save by the simple band about the shapely head, half-way to her feet. Her complexion was white and pure, the rich blood adding a delicious glow beneath the transparent skin. Her dress was a strange mixture of male and female attire, but worn in so piquant a fashion that no one could call it unfeminine. Over trowsers of the Turkish fashion she wore a green kirtle of strong cloth, secured at the waist by a narrow belt of red leather, in which was thrust a silver-mounted revolver and a small bowie. Above this was a hussar-jacket, embroidered in gold and silver thread. A black soft hat, with a drooping feather, was set upon her dark curls, and her feet were incased in tiny moccasins. Loading-stick, bullet-pouch, and the usual appurtenances to a rifle were in their proper places, and she held in her hand a small rifle of the best make.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed. "I have given Elbert the slip, and he will go mad if he does not find me. Oh, how happy I am to-day. I never thought to be so happy."

She sunk down upon a moss-covered knoll in a musing attitude, one small hand supporting her head, and the elbow resting upon the mossy sod, while the other clasped the rifle-barrel. Her beautiful eyes were downcast, and a tender light crept into them.

"I, who had lost all, father, mother, brother and friends, am happy in this wild solitude. Oh, my mother, from your bright home beyond the blue sky, if you are looking down upon your daughter, rest—for at last I have found peace."

A slight rustle in the bushes aroused her, and she sprung quickly to her feet, throwing forward the rifle in a defiant attitude, her dark eyes full of courage. The noise continued, and to her great surprise, an Indian dragged himself with a painful effort from the bushes, and fell gasping at her feet. She saw in a moment that she had nothing to fear from him, for his breast had been pierced by a ball, and the blood was flowing from the wound. The face was a noble one, though a type of the strange, unconquerable race from which he sprung. His breast and limbs were models of manly beauty, and his face was proud and finely cut, though convulsed with the effort to keep down his agony.

"Matonah!" she cried. "What is this? Who has hurt you?"

He could not speak, and she ran to a spring which bubbled up at the foot of a great tree, and filling her cup with water, knelt by his side and bathed his face and lips. Then, by a great effort, she moved him so that his head was supported by the mossy knoll on which she had been sitting, and filling the cup again, washed the blood from the wound. She saw that, although a very severe one, it was not necessarily fatal, being very high up, just below the collar-bone, on the right side.

"There, there, Matonah," she said, softly. "You will do very well, if we can find the ball. I wish you could tell me who has done this."

"White man—ha!" muttered the Indian. "Melvin—Curt Melvin."

"Curtis Melvin?" cried the girl, starting to her feet. "It can not be. He dare not come to this place for his life."

"He come, Silver Star—he come," whispered the Indian. "Shoot Matonah."

"Say no more about it, my poor fellow. Let me see what we can do for you; but first I will call Elbert."

She took a small silver bugle which hung at her belt and blew a call, three times repeated. It was answered by a similar instrument not far away, and she bent over the Indian, with a flush suffusing her beautiful face.

"Silver Star love Elbert; Elbert love Silver Star. Good. Matonah is the friend of both," said the Indian, faintly. "Melvin bad heart—work evil—love Silver Star. Mus' take his scalp some day."

Silver Star, as the Indian called her, after the poetical manner of his race, put her hand under the Indian's shoulder to remove a small stone which was causing him uneasiness. As she did so, her hand touched the naked skin of the warrior, and she felt something hard and smooth bulging just behind the shoulder-blade.

"I think I have found the ball, Matonah," she said. "Turn upon your left side, if you will trust me to remove it."

"Matonah trust Silver Star," replied the Indian, moving his body painfully, so as to bring his shoulder into view. Her delicate fingers passed over the spot where the ball protruded. Satisfied that she was right, she took the bowie from her belt and felt the point. It was sharp as a razor, and perfectly fitted for the work she had to do.

"Silver Star has a woman's heart," said the Indian. "Let her leave this work for a man's hand. Matonah can bear the pain until Elbert comes."

"Are you afraid I can not do it right, and that my hand will tremble, Matonah?" she said. "Look at this."

She went to the spring near at hand, and stooping, filled the cup with water, so full indeed that it seemed as if another drop would cause it to overflow. Yet, so firm was her hand, that she raised it again and again at arm's length, without causing a ripple on the surface.

"Good!" said Matonah. "Silver Star has a man's heart. She shall take out the ball."

She stooped over him again, and by a single dexterous cut, laid bare the bullet, while not a tremor of the flesh betrayed that the Indian felt it in the least. Then pressing hard upon the flesh on each side of the cut, the bullet dropped out into her hand, followed by a gush of blood. She caught up a handful of moss and dried the blood, and while engaged in this, the sound of coming feet was heard, and a handsome young fellow in the dress of a hunter, appeared upon the scene, breathing hard, as if after a run.

"Elsie!" he cried. "What is this? Who has hurt Matonah?"

"I will tell you in a moment. I have found the ball, and here it is. As well as I can make out, he will do very well now, for the wound is pretty high up."

"How is it with you, chief?" said the hunter, kindly. "Will it be long before we hunt the deer together?"

"No, Elbert," said the Indian. "Lost much blood, weak as papoose, but soon be better. Melvin bad man, and mus' have him scalp, Elbert."

"Melvin? What does he mean? Surely you have not seen Curt Melvin, chief?"

"Melvin shoot," replied the Indian, doggedly. "Have him scalp."

"It can not be," said Elbert. "You know well enough that it is as much as Curt Melvin's life is worth to come here now, after what he has done."

"Look at bullet," said the Indian, quietly. "Silver Star got him."

Elbert knew well that every rifleman on the border had a mark in his bullet-mold to distinguish his own bullets from those of others. It was a point of honor with them, in case of a dispute with regard to the ownership of game, to have a mark by which to decide whose bullet laid it low. He took the ball from Elsie's hand, and looking at it closely, saw that it bore the mark of Curtis Melvin—two crossed daggers!

"You are right, chief," he said, earnestly. "And the scoundrel has really dared to come back, and has marked his coming by a bloody deed. He shall taste the justice of Judge Lynch, or my name is not Elbert Spencer. Give us a blast of your bugle, Elsie, and call up the boys."

The girl took the bugle and sounded a call which she knew would be understood. Elbert set to work binding up the wounds of the Indian, who was faint from loss of blood. Elsie kept the bugle, and from time to time repeated the call, and they could tell from various sounds that men were gathering from all quarters. The first who entered the glade was so remarkable in personal appearance that he deserves special notice.

As his head showed itself above the bushes it would have seemed that he was a boy, not more than twelve years old, but, as he came into view, this was explained. He was one of those freaks of nature sometimes seen, in which some part of the frame is deficient. The lower limbs of this strange man were long and muscular, but his body was wonderfully short, and his head seemed to have been settled between his powerful shoulders without a neck. His shoulders were those of a giant, and his arms were of wonderful length and power. Look at him well, for in him you see that celebrated scout and guide, Long-armed Dan, well known along the border. The limbs from which he took his sobriquet were so long that, when standing erect, the extended fingers touched his ankles. The face was smooth as a woman's, with a fresh color in the cheeks, and a high, noble forehead, surmounted by clustering dark hair of great beauty. He was clad in hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins, and carried a very heavy rifle, revolvers and bowie.

"Hey, Elbert," he said, with a good-natured smile, "what made you call us in? Oh, chisels! what's the matter with the Pawnee: I'll be bu'sted if them cussed Hudson Bay chaps ain't round here ag'in."

"They are indeed, Dan," said Elbert. "Look at this bullet."

He laid it in the broad palm of Dan, who recoiled from the contact as if he had touched a serpent, while a terrible light came into his blue eyes.

"Curt Melvin, by the mortal snakes! Whar is he? I kain't wait, kain't live, kain't breathe until I'm on his track. I'll cut his heart out and feed it to the buzzards!"

"Dan!" cried Elsie.

"I forgot myself," said Dan. "Yes, I do, but I kain't

help it," dancing wildly up and down the open space, and striking furiously at an imaginary enemy with his bowie. "Curt Melvin; yes. He's a nice chap, I don't think! You knew Harry Barber, Miss Elsie?"

"Yes."

"You knowed he were killed, I s'pose?"

"Yes, but I never knew how, Dan," she replied.

"I'll tell you. This yer blasted Curt Melvin caught us trapping on the upper Red. An honest boy Harry was, and believed in the North-west Comp'ny and wouldn't take no words from a Hudson Bay man. Melvin come down on us and they killed him like a dog, and I swore I'd never forget it. What! Harry was one of the few who never laughed at poor Dan Newhull, because he wasn't built up like other men, and Curt Melvin killed him, didn't he? And for that I'll have his life. Whar is he; *whar* is he, I say?"

"He is somewhere in the hills, for that ball came from his rifle. Where did you meet him, chief? Speak quick, for the boys will soon be here."

The chief described a glen, some half a mile distant, as the one where he had received the fatal shot. He had caught a fleeting glimpse of the face of his enemy, in the act of firing, and knew him but too well.

"Here come the boys," cried Elbert, and as he spoke a motley group of men began to pour into the opening from all sides. They were the men of the border—that strange mixture of races only to be found upon the western plains. The volatile Frenchman; the stolid German; the cool, ever-wakeful and whittling Yankee; the half-breeds and pure Indian, in all sorts of costumes but with a general tendency to grease and dirt. Reckless, good-natured looking faces there were in the group, but, for all that, they were men who had faced dangers in many shapes and were ready to do so again upon the slightest pretext.

"Scatter, and search the woods, boys," said Elbert. "Dan will show you where to start from. Davis, Benton and Forbes, stay with me and help get the Pawnee into camp. Where is Doctor Sabin?"

"Here, Elbert, my boy," said a gray-haired but hearty-looking old man. "I'm with you."

The men trooped off into the woods again, following Dan, while those who remained lifted the body of the Indian and carried it away to the south, Doctor Sabin and Elsie following them closely.

Long-armed Dan led his companions to the place indicated by the wounded Indian, and scattered to look for "sign." With men who had been trailers and scouts all their lives this was a work of short duration, and a shout from one of their number apprised the rest that he had found the trail. All rushed to the spot and found the successful scout standing over a place under a low spreading tree, where the grass was bent and trodden as if some creature had been lying there. Most men would have been troubled to follow such a clue as this, but to these men it was all-sufficient.

"Look out, boys," said Dan, eagerly. "Don't tramp on the sign. Let me have a look at it, before you say a word."

He knelt upon the grass and gazed long and intently upon it.

"Yes, boys, the Injun was right," he said. "Hyar's whar the skunk laid down, and hyar's whar he made a rest with his elbow when he fired. He was layin' down, and that's all that saved the Pawnee's life, for the bloody skunk knows how to shoot, that's a fact. He had to aim up, and the ball took a slant."

"Who is it?" said one of the men, for Dan had not yet seen proper to say of whom they were in pursuit. At the mention of the name a shout of execration burst from the party, to whom the name seemed to be especially obnoxious.

"Ah, *seelerat!*!" yelled a French trapper, dancing about on the sod. "Zat coquin s'all die by my hand, certainement. *Bah!*"

"Don't blow, Frenchy," said Dan. "I reckon you ain't the only one that's got a grudge ag'in' Curt Melvin. Now for trailing."

They set to work like men who understood their business. The forest quickly hid them from view, and not a sound came from it to tell that they were following with steadfast hate upon the track of the would-be assassin of Materah. Silent, but unwavering, they followed the trail on a run, for

long experience had made Dan equal to this feat. His long limbs carried him over the ground at a pace which the others found it hard to compete with, and he was tireless as a hound.

The trail freshened as they proceeded, and it was evident that Melvin had not taken pains to cover it. What could he mean by this when he knew that any man in the party would shoot him down like a dog upon sight? The course led them deeper and deeper into the foot-hills; the vegetation grew less rank as they proceeded, and they knew that the man they sought could not be far away.

Dan stopped and held up his hand. Every sound was hushed, and these hunters of men held their breaths to listen. Then, with a warning gesture to the rest, Dan crept forward alone, and the rest stood like statues waiting for his signal which they knew would come at the right time.

Suddenly they heard a fierce cry—a yell scarcely human—from the lips of the Long-armed Scout, and, dashing forward, they found him standing alone upon the brink of a great fissure in the earth, caused by some mighty convulsion of nature, beating the air fiercely with his hands.

“Escaped, by the mighty!” he yelled. “Gone! the devil that helped him only knows how.”

CHAPTER II.

WILD NAT'S CAPTIVE.

THE four men who carried the wounded Pawnee went down the mountain side at a brisk pace, and reached the place where they had pitched a camp, in a sheltered glen almost inaccessible to a stranger, but easy of access to those who knew the ground. They had hardly reached the camp and laid the Indian down upon a bed of skins, when a strange being came bounding into camp and bent over the wounded man. A grizzled, fierce, savage-looking creature, with a tawny beard descending to his waist, and clad almost entirely in

the skins of wild beasts, rudely stitched together with the sinews of the deer. In one hand he carried a ponderous pike, which only a giant could have wielded, but which in his grasp swung as easily as a magician's wand. The loose skin which formed the covering of his body was girded at the waist by a broad belt of untanned leather, and in it was thrust a long knife without a sheath. Upon his feet he wore simple moccasins, evidently made by himself, and his head needed no other covering than his uncut hair, which reached below his shoulders.

Elsie recoiled in some alarm from this spectral figure, but Elbert whispered in her ear not to show fear of this strange being, who would be annoyed at such conduct on the part of those he considered his friends.

"It is Wild Nat," he said—"Wild Nat, the Gulch Terror, as he is sometimes called. Rude as he looks, he is a friend of the North-west Company and will do us no harm."

"Blood, blood, blood," whispered the strange being, as he laid his hand upon the breast of the Indian. "Who has shed it?"

"Our enemies, Nat—the enemies of the North-west," said Elbert.

"Ha!" said the wild man, bounding suddenly erect and flourishing his spear. "Show me the place; let Nat strike at them, for he can strike sharp blows and keen. They fear him, ha! ha! ha! They have good cause."

"They have indeed, Nat," said Elbert, kindly, laying his hand upon his arm. "Do you know a man they call Curtis Melvin?"

The creature—he could hardly be called a man—uttered a yell at which the very mountains rung, and struck his terrible spear upon the earth with such tremendous force that it was driven nearly a foot into the sod. For some reason the name drove him frantic, and he rolled upon the earth, uttering a succession of the most fearful cries, and the trapper shrank away appalled.

"Speak to him, Elsie, for heaven's sake," said Elbert. "The voice of a woman can charm him in his wildest moods. Do not fear him but speak to him by his name."

"Nat," said Elsie, sweetly.

"Ha!" said the wild man, starting up to his knees and looking at her fixedly. "An angel has spoken, and Nat has heard the voice. Speak again, and let me hear it."

"You must be very quiet, for the Pawnee is badly hurt. Will you promise to be quiet, for my sake?"

"Yes, yes, yes; Nat will be quiet, when the angel speaks. But *he* said Curtis Melvin was here, and his name always drives Nat wild. Let me go into the mountains and find him. I will bring him bound and lay him at the angel's feet, and then she can kill him, and Nat will look on and laugh."

"Do you think you can find him, Nat?" said Elbert, eagerly.

"Hush!" replied Nat, waving him back with a lofty gesture. "I am speaking to the angel, and she will tell Nat what to do. Let no son of the earth come between her and me."

"What shall I tell him, Elbert?" whispered Elsie.

"Tell him to go and try to find Curt Melvin—he knows the scoundrel well enough—and bring him here. Let him bring him alive, if he can, for we have an account to settle with him."

"What says the angel?" whispered Nat. "Let her speak again."

"You must go out and find this Melvin, as you have promised. He is a wicked man, and will work us great evil if he is left at large. Find him, and bring him to us, but be careful not to hurt him."

"Nat hears, and will obey. Ha! ha! ha! He must hide close if the Wild Man of the Gulch will not find him. Must I bring him to this place?"

"Yes: are you strong enough to do it?"

"The angel does not ask that of Nat!" cried the strange creature, with another of his wild laughs. "See; I struck the spear into the earth with one hand. Let one of these strong men pull it out with *two*."

The pike was still standing upright in the earth where he had thrust it, and Elbert seized it, and although a strong man, well knit and muscular, the exertion of all his strength could not move it. Nat laughed again, and fastening upon

the haft of the spear with his strong right hand, he plucked it easily from the earth and shook it above his head.

"Strong! Ha! ha! ha! Nat is the strong man of the mountains—the Terror of the North-west—the Demon of the wood ranges. He will bring Curt Melvin to the angel and lay him at her feet."

"Be careful of yourself, Nat," said Elbert. "Don't let him get a shot at you, for you know that he shoots close."

"Does Nat fear him?" cried the madman. "Who can kill *him*? Dick has tried to die, he has prayed for death, but something turns the bullets away from him. The grizzly turns aside from the path he treads, and the courejou slinks into the cover when he passes by. No, Nat has no fear of Curt Melvin."

"Go at once," said Elbert. "The place where the Pawnee was shot was in 'Cleft Cañon,' under the low pine bush by the sulphur spring."

The wild man sprung forward, pressed his lips to the hand of Elsie, and with an unearthly cry, bounded away into the woods.

"Who is this fearful being?" said Elsie. "Is he mad?"

"Any one can see that," replied Elbert. "Yes, poor Nat is mad, but who he is, or whence he came, no man can tell. I have it from trappers and Indians that for many years he has haunted these hills, living the life of a wild beast, in the dens and caves of the mountains. In some way he has imbibed the most fearful hatred of the Hudson Bay Company, and especially of Curtis Melvin, and he neglects no opportunity to strike a blow at any of the employees of our enemies."

"Where did you know him first, Elbert?"

"I met him strangely, in the gulch which he haunts most, about three miles from this place. I was out with a party, as now, and in some way had been separated from my men, and was attacked by three Hudson Bay men. This border feud has been going on for years, you must understand, and there have been more bloody deeds done than people in the East dream of. They were too many for me, and I should have fared badly if Nat had not come down upon them with one of his wild yells, and they got to their horses and

fled for their lives, leaving one of their number dead behind them. Since then I have met Nat often, and he has always been my friend."

"Poor fellow. How does he live through the cold winters?"

"He lives in a cave—where, I do not exactly know, and he is cunning enough to lay in a stock of provisions for the winter, early in the fall."

"I should have thought he would have been killed by the Indians, long ago."

"The Indians! They fear him more than any created being; and besides, no true Indian would lift his hand against a man on whom the singer of the Great Spirit had been laid. He is truly a wonderful man, and has done us great service before now. Mad as he is, a keener scout or a more daring fighter I never saw. Did you notice that I depended upon your influence over him, although you had never seen him?"

"Yes; is a woman's influence so great, then?"

"It is absolute. If you had not spoken, in a moment more he might have taken us for enemies, and I do not wish to be one of the four men he chooses to attack. Hark; I believe that the boys are coming in. I wonder if they have been successful?"

The question was soon answered, for the men began to come in with sullen faces, and it was plain that Melvin had eluded them. Dan came sulking in, long after the rest, and sat down in a despondent attitude, his long arms wreathed about his knees.

"You could not trail him, then?" said Elbert.

"Trail him? Trail the devil! He broke the sign at a gulch, twelve feet wide, and though we s'arched fur it up and down, we couldn't raise the color nohow. It's enough to make a man strike his maternal ancestor."

"We shall have him yet, Dan. There is only one man who can beat you at this sort of work—"

"Any one kin beat me. I'm a nat'ral born fool, as every one knows," said Dan, angrily.

"Not a bit of it. You are the best scout in this camp, except one, and that one is even now upon his trail. Can you think who I mean?"

"Was I wrong when I thought I heerd Wild Nat laugh, about half an hour ago, Elbert?"

"No; you did hear him."

"And *he's* arter Curt Melvin! Then the devil save him if he can, for he is a gone coon. Hurray for Wild Nat, says I. I wish I'd 'a' know'd he were out and I'd 'a' gone with him."

"I don't think he would have any one, Dan," replied Elbert. "He always likes to go out alone."

"I know that, but he'd take me. Somehow he seems to think that we ain't either of us like ordinary men, and have a feller-feeling in our bosoms. Leastways, he'll take me with him when he wouldn't hev no one else. Whar did he go?"

"I sent him to the place where the chief was shot."

"All right; he'll trail the consarned skunk, never fear. I found something jest now, cap."

"What was it?"

"This," said Dan, holding up an arrow stained red with some mountain berry. "What do you think of that, now?"

"War!" replied Elbert. "Was it meant for us?"

"I ain't so sure. It's enough to know that the red arrer never is sent unless the Injuns mean business. Ha! look at that."

As he spoke something glanced into the camp and struck a large tree near at hand. Dan sprung up and grasped it, and held up the fellow of the arrow which he had found—also stained red.

"That's enuff," said the scout. "They mean *us*, and the quicker we git ready for a scrimmage the better fer us. Doctor, how is the Pawnee?"

"If it were a white man who had received the wound I might keep him on his back for a week, but he will be ready for another fight in a day or two."

"Ready *now*," said Matonah. "Who has sent the red arrow to my white brothers? Let a warrior of the Pawnees look at it."

They placed one of the arrows in his hand and he looked at it with an expression of surprise and disgust.

"Negara is a Sioux," he said. "The Sioux are dogs, and

have always been enemies to the Pawnees. But why should a Sioux be a chief in the great tribe of the Blackfeet?"

"Do you tell us that Negara has sent this arrow, Mato-nah?"

The Indian nodded his head in silence, and they had too much confidence in his knowledge of these matters to doubt that he spoke the truth. Elbert received the news with any thing but pleasure, for he knew this Negara well, and that he was a desperate and terrible enemy. He was a half-breed Sioux, who had been driven from his tribe for some great crime, and had joined the Blackfeet, making their cause his own. A desperate fighter, a man of rare natural endowments, he had won a name for himself second to none along the border. The trappers told many tales of his ferocity, and hated him like death. His band was trained perfectly, and would not turn back easily from any fight, and, being well armed, skillful horsemen, and bold in their attacks, they were much to be feared on many accounts. The party of which Elbert Spencer was the leader had come out upon the plains for a double purpose, partly to look out new trapping-ground for the coming season and partly to drive out the encroaching employees of the Hudson Bay Company, who were then growing unusually bold, on account of some successes in the last season. Elbert had been a captain of the North-west Company for some years, and although a young man, had been intrusted with the command for his known courage and discretion.

But, who was Elsie Vedder, and what was she doing in this wild region, so far from civilization, living among half-savage men, upon apparently equal terms? The story is soon told, and it had been more than once repeated in the history of the West. She had been the only one saved from an Indian massacre upon the plains, when a child, by an old trapper who had acted as guide to the unfortunate party, and who had from that time reared her as his own child, since every one who knew her had died under the hatchets of the Indians. This trapper, when leaving upon any of his expeditions, had always left her at one of the forts, in the care of some friends. During that time she had attracted the notice of an officer's lady, who had taken pains to give her an edu-

cation, and the girl had learned rapidly until she was accomplished beyond any thing often attained upon the border. Among other things she played the guitar with ease and grace, and sung sweetly, and the camp had often been held spell-bound as she sung Moore's beautiful melodies.

The design of the expedition, after performing the work assigned them in this section, was to cross the mountains and reach one of the Company's forts upon the Upper Missouri. At this fort the adopted father of Elsie was stationed, and he had deputed Elbert to bring her with him when he crossed the mountains. An old trapper himself, he had none of that dread of the dangers of the prairie which might have been felt by other men, and no fears in her making the journey in safety. And as he knew that Elbert loved her and would guard her with his life from all danger, he was quite at ease in regard to her.

While the brigade were busying themselves in fortifying the camp against assault, in bringing in the horses and securing them against the danger of a stampede, and the leaders were puzzling themselves over the probable designs of the Indians who had sent the red arrow, they heard, far off, the wild cry of Nat, the Terror of the Gulch, and listened intently.

"Nat is like a hound, and never gives tongue unless he is on a scent," said Elbert. "I should not be surprised if he did bring Melvin into camp."

"I shall be surprised if he *don't*," said Dan. "He never gives up. They may kill him, and of course that will end it, but, unless they do so, he's bound to have that pizen critter."

He was right. The night had not yet come, and the guards were being posted, when Wild Nat came into camp, carrying a burden thrown across his shoulder, which he hung down at the feet of Elsie, with one of his wild laughs.

"There he is, angel! I tol' you Nat could bring him!"

It was a man strongly bound with green withes, and bleeding from the effect of a crushing stroke upon his forehead.

Wild Nat had kept his word.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIAL

A cry of execration went up among the members of the brigade as they saw the face of the man who had been brought in by Wild Nat, as the mariae rolled him over on his back and pointed at it. The withes were torn from his limbs and he was dragged to an upright position, and firmly held, while Elbert stepped out to question him. The expression of the prisoner's face was defiant, and his hands opened and shut convulsively as his dark eyes wandered from face to face among his enemies. It was a remarkable countenance, smooth and almost girlish in its expression, looking like that of a boy twenty years of age, although in reality he was nearer forty. His hair was dark, glossy and straight as an Indian's. His eyes dark and passionate, and his hands and feet singularly small and delicate for a man. Yet, young as he looked, this was one of the most desperate characters upon the frontier—a man stained by many crimes, and capable of any atrocity. When he speke his voice was smooth, soft and gentle, like a woman's, and he never raised it from that gentle, flowing key, even in his wildest moods.

"So you have come, Curtis Melvin?" said Elbert. "We are right glad to welcome you."

"No doubt," replied the other. "I have come because I have been forced to do so, and I wish to ask you why you have set a lunatic upon me who might have taken my life."

"I would have done it," yelled Nat. "Yes, yes, I would have hung him up for the vultures to pick at, if the angel had not told me to bring him alive."

"So you set him on, Miss Elsie?" said Melvin, looking at her with a strange, intent gaze. "You of all others! In the time to come I shall remember this kindness."

"You ought to thank her for it, base hound," said Elbert.

"But for her you would not now be alive. Not that it signifies much, for, unless I am much mistaken in the temper of the men, you have not long to live."

"Of course you will murder me," said Melvin. "I knew that as soon I was certain into whose hands I had fallen. It was a womanly deed, Elsie Vedder—a gentle act, and one to be proud of!"

"You are not to speak to her, Melvin," said Elbert. "She has nothing to do with it, except in ordering Nat not to do you any harm."

"I appreciate her motive, which was to exult over my sorrows and see me abase myself before you, and beg for my life. But, by the gods of the heathen—whom I am ready to believe in as any others—that pleasure shall be denied you all, for I will die with my teeth set. Come; when do you intend to murder me?"

"You shall have a fair trial, sir; I promise that."

"A *fair* trial? Ha! ha! ha! A fair trial, with *you* for a judge and *your* men for a jury! That is the best joke of the season, upon my honor. I am delighted with the prospect before me, and appreciate the generosity of your nature. Bah! go on with your farce."

"There is no hurry about it," said Elbert. "The time will come quickly enough, and there is not a man here who would do you an injustice."

"Oh, no, certainly not. Your coolness is really refreshing, but I am in your hands to do with as you may think fitting. Confound it, man, I know what Judge Lynch's court is, do I not?"

"You ought to know," said Long-armed Dan, "if being hauled up by the Rigilators is any criterion to go by."

"Learned language, upon my honor as a man," said the other, laughing lightly, even in the face of his deadly peril. "I am proud to say that only one man could have tracked me down, and that is the mad devil who has done it. If his hide was not knife and bullet-proof he would have found a grave in the gulch to-day. But, let it pass, I will not waste your time, most puissant Judge Lynch."

"Form the court!" cried the men, hoarsely. "We won't stand his talk any longer!"

"That is right, jurymen. Convict a man before you try him. I knew how it would be," laughed Melvin.

"Elsie," said the young captain, "I must beg you to go away, and at once. We have a duty to perform, and no one can be more grieved than I am that it has fallen to my lot to be the leader in it. Such a sight is not for you, and I beg you to go away."

"You deny her a great pleasure, and one she has no doubt counted on," said Melvin, smoothly. "Why drive her away?"

"You know that it is not true, Melvin," replied Elsie, softly. "No one knows better than yourself how sad it is for me to see a man who has had it in his power—through natural endowments—to be a good and noble man so debased and sin stained as you are. It would not be a pleasure for me to see you in your degradation."

"Whose fault is it that I am what I am?" he answered, in the same tone he had used throughout. "You had it in your power to change me utterly. I laid all I had to offer at your feet and you threw it aside as an unworthy thing, and now you reproach me as being a desperate man. Go then, if you will, and leave me to my fate, whatever it may be."

Elsie covered her face with her hands and hurried away from the camp, and in her wretchedness and the desire to go as far as possible from sight and sound of the court about to be assembled, went further away than was perhaps expedient and sat down in a dejected attitude at the foot of a great tree, from which she could not see the camp. Elbert waited until she was out of sight, and then turned to his men with a sad look in his face.

"Let us get this sad business over as soon as possible," he said. "Who shall be judge of this court?"

"You! you!" cried many voices.

"I accept the position," he said, "although I would much prefer that another should occupy it. Let me suggest some one in my place, who can have no ill-feeling against the prisoner, and will be more acceptable to him."

"Who is it?"

"The doctor."

"Hurrah! Good!" roared the men. "Come out, Doc., you have got to be Judge Lynch for once."

"No, no," said the doctor. "I know nothing of the merits of the case, and I prefer not to act."

"Don't refuse, doctor," said Elbert, hurriedly, as the men began to murmur among themselves. "You are the best man for the position, and I will be the prosecutor, and you have only to decide the case upon the testimony."

The doctor looked once around the circle of livid faces and saw that a refusal to act might be visited upon himself, and stepped into the midst of the circle.

"I accept, boys," he said. "You know that I am opposed to these infernal trials, but I will act."

He could hardly blame them, for their only safety was in courts of this kind, where civil law was a thing unknown. He took his seat upon a rocky boulder, which raised him above the circle of the rest, and demanded why the court was assembled.

"To try the prisoner, Curtis Melvin, accused of the murder of several persons, whose names I will state," said Elbert, standing forward as prosecuting attorney.

"First: he is accused of murdering, or causing to be murdered, a man named Harry Barber, on the upper Red River, about the 12th of September, 18—."

"What say you to this charge, prisoner?" asked the judge.

"Bah! I shall make no plea," replied the prisoner. As he spoke there was a peculiar, piercing cry coming from the opposite side of the canon. The prisoner started, raised his head and listened intently for a moment, and then, seeming to come to a decision, said, in a clear voice:

"Not guilty."

"Second, he is accused of killing, by a pistol-shot, at the Royal Ranch in Kansas City, a man named Willis Sargeant, over a game at cards."

The prisoner made the same plea as before, and still seemed to listen to the sounds outside the camp.

"Third, he is accused of causing to be burned at the stake on the 10th of May, 18—, Burt Bentley, formerly a member of this brigade.

"Fourth, he is accused of shooting the Pawnee chief called Matonah, who now lies wounded in this camp."

To both these charges the prisoner replied as before—not guilty.

"Bring your witnesses, Mr. Prosecuting Attorney," said the Judge.

"As to the first charge," said Elbert, rising, "I have no witnesses to bring except Dan, the scout. Dan, tell your story."

Dan stepped forward, and was greeted by the prisoner in a laughing manner, though he kept turning his head to look across the ravine.

"On the 12th of September, 18—, I was trapping on the upper Red," said Dan, "and Harry Barber was with me. We had taken some pelts and were doing well, but that night our camp was struck by four men, none of whom I know'd except Curt Melvin, the prisoner. We had a fight, and I broke out and got away after Harry was down. I swear that I saw this prisoner strike him on the head with a hatchet, even after he fell. This is true, so help me God."

The witness was about to step back when Melvin, who was evidently anxious to gain time, stopped him.

"I beg pardon of the court, but am I not at liberty to question the witness in my own behalf?"

"Certainly," replied the doctor.

"Now, Dan," said the prisoner, "this is business. You swear, first, that this attack was made in the night?"

"Yes."

"Was it a dark night?"

"No; the moon was shining."

"Had you a camp-fire?"

"No; not such fools in the Injun kentry, with such skunks as you layin' round loose."

"No reflections of that kind, witness," said the Doctor. "Answer the questions as they are put to you."

"You had no fire, but the moon was shining? Your camp was under the timber, of course, as you were good scouts?"

"Of course."

"Then how can you undertake to swear away the life of a

man whom you only saw in the uncertain moonlight, and that, too, under the shadow of the trees?"

"I'm morilly sartin it was you," said Dan, lowering his voice.

"Your honor," said Melville, "you surely can not convict upon such testimony as this. I have nothing more to ask this witness."

"Pass on to the next charge. Who are your witnesses, Spencer?"

"Upon this charge, none of the witnesses can be produced, but I can prove, by unimpeachable testimony, that the prisoner was convicted upon this charge in the District Court at Kansas City, and that he afterward escaped from custody and they have not since been able to arrest him."

Several men swore to being present at the trial, hearing the testimony and the conviction of Melvin. By artful questioning he made it appear that the person so convicted had borne another name, and that they had only heard from others that he and Melvin were the same person.

In regard to the third charge, the witnesses proved that Melvin was with the party of Indians who had burned Bentley, but had not taken an active part in the proceedings, although he appeared to be under no restraint, but on friendly terms with the savages.

Matonah testified that he had seen the face of Melvin just as he received the shot from the bush, and knew it well. Even over his testimony this artful man endeavored to throw some doubt, and had almost succeeded, when Elbert arose with a new piece of evidence.

"Your honor," he said, "with a skill worthy of a finished lawyer the prisoner has conducted his own defense; but I propose to bring in a piece of evidence which he can not controvert. Dan, remove the shot-pouch from his side and place it in the hands of the judge. In the mean time, your honor, look closely at this ball, so as to be able to identify it."

He placed a bullet in the hand of the doctor, while at the same time Dan removed the bullet-pouch from the person of the prisoner and laid it upon the rock.

"Have you looked at the ball, your honor," asked Elbert,

turning a look upon the face of Melvin, who grew pale.
"What is the mark?"

"Two crossed daggers."

"Now open the pouch which has just been taken from the prisoner, and compare the bullet with those it contains."

The judge did so, and found them in size, shape and marks, to exactly coincide with the bullet he held in his hand.

"That bullet, your honor," said Elbert, was taken from the wound of Matonah by Elsie Vedder, and given to me. What better proof do you ask?"

"How do you know that this is true?" gasped Melvin.
"Did you see the ball removed?"

"I did not, but Miss Vedder gave it to me when I came up, telling me that it came from the wound."

"More hearsay evidence, sir," said Melvin. "It seems that not a word of genuine evidence can be had here. I demand that Miss Vedder give her testimony."

"I would not do that," said the doctor. "Why should the poor girl be made to grieve by giving evidence against you? I beg you not to do it."

"And I insist on it. Do you think that, for fear of giving her a moment's pain, I will forfeit my life? She must be called, or I impeach the justice of this so-called court."

"Ob, shet up!" cried Dan. "You've had more than fair play, and given the lie a dozen times to men whose shoes you ain't no right to untie. A sentence, judge—a sentence."

"A sentence!" cried the others.

"No, men, no," cried the doctor. "I'm judge in this court, and I won't be dictated to by any one. Come, now; you are determined to have Miss Vedder's testimony?"

"Yes."

"You demand it as a right?"

"Yes," he persisted.

"Very good. Some one step out, and ask Miss Vedder to come this way."

Two or three men started officiously out to call her, and went in the direction she had taken. On arriving at the tree where she had sat down, they were observed to start and look anxiously about them.

"What are the men doing?" said the judge. "Why don't they hurry?"

"Perhaps she will refuse to come," said Elbert.

"Then she must be brought," replied the judge, impatiently.
"You, Elbert Spencer, go and bring her."

Elbert stepped out of the circle, with a dim foreboding of evil in his heart, and ran to the place where the men were grouped in consultation at the foot of a tree. As he came up, he saw that Elsie was not there, but one of the men pointed silently to the grass at the foot of the tree. Elbert looked wildly at it, uttered a cry of horror, and staggered back, a look of terror imprinted on his face.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXCHANGE THE FIRST SHOT.

WHAT had he seen to change his face so suddenly? There, imprinted upon the soft earth was a single footprint, made by a moccasined foot. That, in itself, was nothing, but by that keen knowledge of woodcraft which Elbert had in common with all the members of his party, he knew that the mark was made by an Indian's foot. There was no sign of a struggle, but Elsie was gone, and only this was left to tell how, and night was coming on. Just then a shrill, tremulous cry was heard upon the other side of the cañon as before, and now Melvin bounded suddenly erect and a look of ferocious joy came into his face.

"At last, at last!" he said. "The work is done and I am safe. Dolt, cowards, dogs! I spit at and defy you. Away with your mock courts, your trials for deeds of which I am proud!"

"You hear him!" cried Dan. "He confesses his guilt. Sentence him, Judge Lynch, and let's have it over."

"You dare not, for your lives," was the reply. "Wait for Elbert Spencer and see what he has to tell you."

Even as he spoke Elbert hurried up with wild and startled looks.

"She is gone, boys ; taken by the Indians."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Melvin. "Taken by *my* friends ; you understand? Now lay a finger on me, if you dare!"

They did understand him but too well. If any wrong was done him, she must suffer for it, if indeed he spoke the truth, and the poor girl was in the hands of his friends.

"You need not believe me, boys," he said. "You will hear from my fellows before long, you may be sure. Ha! keep that devil away from me as you value the girl's life."

"Wait, Nat, wait," cried Elbert, pushing the maniac back as he made a rush at the prisoner, with a fierce look in his eyes. "If you touch him now, the angel will be killed."

Nat fell back with a helpless look, his eyes fixed upon the face of the speaker.

"Where is she?" he said, in a faint voice. "He must tell."

"That would do no good, Nat. We must find her without his help."

"Hullo, there!" cried a voice from the other side of the cañon. "I want to come over, but will not unless you promise that I shall come safely."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind that. Do you promise that I shall go as safely as I come?"

"Yes ; come over. That is one of your fellows, I suppose, Melvin?"

"Of course ; I told you that you should hear from them."

They waited for some moments, and then a man came scrambling up the sides of the cañon, and drew himself up to the level ground. As he approached they saw it was a half-breed, in the semi-savage dress of the border, carrying a rifle, hatchet and knife.

"How are you, boys?" he said, boldly. "I've got a little matter of business to do with you if you will allow me. Ah! how are you, Curt?"

"As well as could be expected of a man who has been treated as I have been," he said. "Why the deuce didn't you come before?"

"Had a little business to do first, that we couldn't get over

before," he said; "and now I am ready for work. I see you've got a friend of mine in limbo, Captain Spencer. May I ask what you mean by that?"

"I want to know first who you are, my man," said Elbert. "Come; speak up."

"Oh, I'll do that," replied the stranger, quietly. "My name is Hank Wilson, though I don't know what particular good the name can do you, anyhow."

"Very well, Mr. Hank Wilson; what do you want here?"

"Came to look after my friend. In fact, that's a number of us quite anxious about him and we want him to be set free."

"You are very anxious for that little favor, I suppose."

"Rather so, I should say. In fact, they won't hear to any thing else."

"But, suppose we do not care to let him go, and have established a sort of claim upon him?"

"Oh, see here, captain; this sort of thing won't do. You are only wasting valuable time to no purpose. Be so good as to look at that little docymennt."

He put a small folded paper, a leaf torn from a note-book, into the hands of Elbert, who unfolded it quickly, and read these words, written hastily in pencil:

"DEAR ELBERT: I have been taken by a body of men, partly Indians and partly half-savage white men, who threaten me with a terrible death if Curtis Melvin is not released. Do as you think best, for I am armed for any fate which may await me. If any thing happens, and we can not meet again, believe that I have been true to you and your dear love.

"ELSIE."

"Who gave you this, you scoundrel?" said Elbert, turning savagely upon Wilson.

"Good words, captain—good words, if you please. We of the border do not allow ourselves to be insulted by any man, no matter who he is. The person that wrote that letter wrote her name on the inside, you know. And sartin you ought to be able to tell whether it's her hand-write or not."

"You have come to make a proposal; out with it."

"We think a good deal of Curt Melvin, that's a fact. We ought to or we wouldn't dere to make the offer we do.

We will give up the gal for him, and nobody else; that's the proposition I am to make."

"Do you know that this man's life is forfeited by the laws?"

"We ain't got no laws out here but the law of the strongest hand. I've played my ace; foller my lead!"

"I must speak with my friends first. Nat?"

The wild man approached at the word and grasped his spear.

"You see this fellow, Nat," said Elbert. "While we are talking ponder, see to it that he does not move away from the spot where he now stands, or say any thing to Curtis Melvin. Do you understand me?"

Nat lifted his spear in a significant manner and looked at Wilson in a way which made him tremble.

"Now see here," he said, "kain't you give me another sort of guard? This devil may take it into his head to spear me like a frog. Set some one else to watch me."

"He'll do," replied Elbert, coolly, calling the leading men of the band about him. Wilson, in mortal terror, crouched upon the spot where he had been standing, hardly daring to look up. The others went aside and held a short conference. Much as they hated Melvin, this could have but one issue, for there was not a man among them who had not been touched by the beauty and grace of Elsie, or would not have laid down his life in her defense. They soon came back and Elbert signed to Nat to stand aside.

"We agree to your proposition," he said. "Now is the exchange to be effected?"

"Why," said Wilson, "seeing I am here, I don't see that we can do any other way than to let me take Melvin with me, when I go back, and then we will send the gal over to you, of course."

"Excuse me," replied Elbert. "While I have the strongest faith that you are a man of the strictest honor, I dislike very much to expose you to temptation of this kind. We must take another course, for fear you might forget to give up the lady."

"Oh," said Wilson, with a grin. "That's the idea, eh?"

That's the idea, clumsy expressed, no doubt, but having

meaning in it. You will return to your people and bring the lady to the bottom of the gulch. You are at liberty to take one man with you to perform the duty. I will take one of my men and bring the prisoner to the same place, and there we will make the exchange."

"That's fair enough. Shall you come armed?"

"Just as you like about that. Perhaps both of us had better bring our weapons."

"Nothing more to be said, I suppose?"

"Nothing that I can think of. You had better make haste, as night is coming on, as you may see."

The man gave them a rough salutation, and hastened away. Nat looked after him with an evident desire to try the temper of his spear upon him, but was restrained by his fear that an injury might be done to Elsie. Mad as he was, he seemed to understand that, and restrained himself bravely. Fifteen minutes passed, and Hank Wilson, accompanied by a tall Indian, appeared at the opposite side of the cañon. The Indian held Elsie by the wrist, and her appearance was greeted by a stunning cheer from the brigade.

"Bring the prisoner, Dan," said Elbert. "You may as well take your rifle, in case of treachery, although I don't think they will dare to try that. Keep your eyes on them, lads, and if you see any thing wrong you know what to do."

The men grasped their rifles and ran to the edge of the cañon, and Dan took charge of Melvin, from whose hands the withes had not yet been removed. They helped him down the rugged and precipitous path, and met the others in the center of the cañon.

"Here we are," said Wilson, gayly. "Even exchange, they say, is no robbery; and now, if you'll give Melvin up to us, we'll give you the gal and go on our way rejoicing."

In a moment Elsie was in her lover's arms, and Melvin was standing unbound among his friends. For a moment he seemed to be inclined to try conclusions with his enemies upon the spot, but a look at the grinning row of rifles upon the rocks above warned him that the thought was madness.

"We have met and we have parted," he said, quietly. "It will not be my fault if it is our last meeting. Miss Vedder, I wish to say a word to you."

"I have no desire to speak to you, Curtis Melvin," she said. "I can not say that I am sorry you have escaped from death, but beyond that I have no wish in connection with you."

"But you must hear me. I am not loud or turbulent, and you can not deny me this privilege."

"We have no time to waste, Curtis Melvin," said Elbert. "Say what you have to say quickly, and have done with it."

"It is only this, and is not addressed to you. I love that hard-hearted girl who is resting so confidently upon your arm, and in other days she gave me reason to believe that she at least did not hate me."

"Until you deceived me; until you showed yourself in your true character, that of a desperate and wicked man. Even when with us, you were plotting to betray us."

"You drove me to it. If I committed a crime, it was in a moment of passion and in my own defense. I see that I can not justify myself, and you have only yourself to blame for what follows. As for you, Elbert Spencer, the hate I bear you will find its vengeance against you in a day not far off."

"I do not fear you, Melvin," replied the young man.

"You have cause to do so, my dear young man. Wait; the time will come when you will beg on your knees for death at my hands. Be sure of that."

"Go, or I will forget the compact we have made, and draw upon you."

"Curt, Curt," whispered Wilson, "it won't do, you know. That's forty rifles p'inted at us this very minit, and they kerry true."

"It would be like you to betray me even now, Spencer," Why don't you do it?"

"I tell you to go at once."

"I am going; but before the sun rises again you shall hear from me, in a fashion you little dream of. Lead the way, Hank, for we are wasting time."

Both parties turned hastily and began to ascend opposite sides of the ravine, Elbert assisting Elsie up the difficult ascent, and breathing more freely when they reached the top safely, and she sunk down exhausted.

Give me a moment before you question me, Elbert," she said. "I am out of breath."

One of the men brought her a cup of water, and she drank it eagerly and appeared to be refreshed.

"Now, my dear Elsie, tell me what you know of this strange affair. And while she is doing it, Dan, you had better post the men, taking especial care whom you put on the outer guard, for we shall have trouble to-night."

Dan hurried away to perform the duty, and Elbert sat down upon the rock beside Elsie.

"When I left the camp," said she, "I sat down upon the other side of the tree yonder, out of sight and hearing, for I did not wish to know any thing about what was going on. I can not tell you how it was done, but while I sat there a cloth was thrown over my head from behind, so quickly and skillfully that I had not time to cry out. When the cloth was thrown off, the white man you saw with me just now was bending over me, threatening me with an upraised knife if I made a movement. An Indian who was with him thrust a gag into my mouth, and then they lifted me and carried me rapidly into the lower cañon. Once there, they put a handkerchief over my eyes and hurried me quickly over a rough path for some distance, when I heard the sound of voices, and when the bandage was removed I was in the center of a circle of savage faces, most of them Indians, although many were white men and half-breeds, who were evidently under the leadership of the man called Wilson. They did not allow me to observe much, but, after threatening me in a dreadful manner, they gave me a pencil and paper and told me to write to you, and I did it. The man Wilson went away, and when he came back I was blindfolded again, and led back, I think, by another course. The bandage was removed from my eyes just as we reached the ravine."

"You know nothing of the number of these men?"

"I saw at least thirty white men and half-breeds, and perhaps sixty Indians; but I did not have time to count them."

"How were the Indians armed?"

"Most of them had rifles, I should think."

"It certainly is the band of Negarah. Did you see any

Indian wearing three eagle feathers in his head-dress, with a red belt about his waist?"

"I did not notice any such."

"Strange; he ought to be there, certainly. I am sorry that Melvin got away, for he is sure to make us trouble, and I do not like to lose any of my men. Ha!"

With the exclamation he sprung suddenly from the boulder, dragging her with him. Not a moment too soon, for a bullet sung through the air a second after, passing over the spot where they had sat.

"To arms!" cried Elbert. "They are coming, or the red arrow tells false tales. Steady, and take good aim!"

CHAPTER V.

THE BATTLE BY NIGHT.

THE camp of the trappers was a sort of natural fortress, and not easy of access on any side, nor commanded by any eminence higher than itself within rifle-range. On one side lay the narrow cañon, the precipitous walls of which were not easy to climb, and, if climbed, it must be done in the face of the riflemen of the brigade, who knew how to use their rifles well. On the west, a thick growth of bushes and trees formed a convenient shelter, from which an attack upon that side could be repelled, and that with safety to the defenders. Upon the east and south was a long, level stretch, affording no cover to the assailants, but broken enough to make it almost impossible for horse to charge. Years of experience upon the border had taught Elbert many lessons, and he had made use of his knowledge in choosing the camp.

The attack was commenced by a fire of sharp-shooters upon the other side of the ravine, which would have made the camp untenable but for the sort of natural parapet that ran along the verge of the cañon, behind which the brigade ensconced itself and returned the fire.

"Now then, Dan," whispered the young captain, "take care

of this ravine with ten men as I call off their names. The main attack will come in another place."

He called off the names of ten men, who silently ranged themselves along the verge of the ravine. They were all finished marksmen, and he knew that he could trust them.

"Elsie?" he said, looking about for her. "Where are you?"

"Here," she said, in a low voice.

He turned quickly and saw her kneeling beside Dan, gripping her little rifle, and, to all appearance, as eager for the fray as the boldest man among them.

"You must not expose yourself, Elsie," cried her lover. "You might get hit."

"So might any one here, and in what am I better than the brave men who are around me? Do your duty, Elbert, and leave me to do mine."

"I'll take keer of her," said Dan. "Oh, glory, what a row we will have!"

There was no time to waste in idle words, and quickly turning, Elbert called to his men, and stooping low, they glided into the bushes which fringed the western side of the camp. The moon was up, and objects were plainly distinguishable at a distance of a hundred yards. They could hear the rapid crack of rifles on both sides of the ravine, and knew that Dan and his men were resolutely defending their position. On this side, however, not a sound was heard, but, to practiced Indian-fighters, this was only a proof that they were in the right place.

The scouts, who were further out than the line of bushes behind which Elbert and his men lay, had received their orders, and not a shot was fired. The duel of rifles was yet at its height when the scouts, giving the signal to an ounce the approach, came creeping in rapidly, and throwing themselves into the cover, turned at bay.

"They are here, Cap.," said one. "Git ready for work, I tell ye."

"Indians?"

"A miscellaneous Willin', cap. Comin' on ther hands an' knees."

"Hush!" whispered Elbert. "I see them, boys. Don't

fire until you can see their eyes shine, and then give it to them. You have your orders when to fire, and don't let any man fire out of his turn. When the rifles are empty, out knives and revolvers and at them."

A silence like the grave now fell upon the scene, and the fire of the men at the ravine began to slacken. All at once it burst forth with renewed fury, as a light showed itself upon the open space in front of the bushes, glimmered for a moment and was gone. Then, as if by magic, a dark mass which until now had been lying on the plain, rose as one man, and rushed on with fearful speed. The trappers made no sign. Had they suddenly been stricken blind and dumb? The force of the enemy had almost reached the woods, when, as if a spring had been touched or a match lighted, a terrible rifle-fire burst out directly in their faces, scattering ruin and death through their ranks, and as they staggered before that withering volley, a second force, which had reserved its fire until now, rose suddenly and sent forth a more deadly discharge. So close were they, that after the deadly strife was over, some of the assailing party were found with their faces actually scorched by the powder.

This sudden fire, coming from a quarter where they least expected it, was more than the assailants could bear, and they had actually turned to fly, when a terrible war-cry rung, and a man wearing the three eagle-feathers of a chief, with his arms bared to the shoulders, and stained red as if with gore, and carrying a heavy hatchet in his hand, burst in upon them and literally forced them back to the assault. One man, who would have fled, was cut down by the chief, and the rest, seeming to fear him more than the enemy in front with ferocious yells, headed by this terrible warrior, darted forward to the attack.

By this time the rifles were reloaded, and, as before, the head of the assailing party was swept away by a close and terrible fire. In spite of that, they pushed on fiercely, but as they reached the line of wood, the second volley tore through them with fearful effect. The warrior looked about him and saw how fearfully his ranks were decimated by the fire—but there was no time to dally, and they pressed forward.

Up rose the trappers' knives and revolvers ready, and for

five minutes a fearful struggle for the possession of the woods continued. The leader of the assailants was everywhere, striking terrible blows with knife and hatchet, and encouraging his men by voice and action. The defenders had the advantage of fighting under cover of the bushes, while the assailants were completely exposed. Yet, their numbers being greater, and stimulated by the example of their chief, whose valiant bearing aroused even the admiration of his enemies, they forced back the defenders until they actually obtained a foothold in the edge of the woods.

At the beginning of the fray, the combatants were unequal in force, but the destructive fire which the assailants had endured, had made them nearly equal, and the losses of each had been about the same since the hand-to-hand conflict had commenced. Elbert was certain that at least one-half the force opposed to him, although all were painted in Indian fashion, were half-breeds and white men, from the determined way in which they fought, and he recognized the leader, by his costume, as the redoubtable chief Negara, who had sent the red arrow to his camp that day.

Both parties now paused for breath, and the trappers seized the moment to fill the chambers of their revolvers with cartridges, and get ready for a new struggle. They were aware from the sounds in front that their enemies were being constantly reinforced by the coming of new men, but Elbert did not feel strong enough to commence the struggle, but rather to act upon the defensive. He had not long to wait, for, at a signal shout, the attacking party glided simultaneously from behind the trees where they had found shelter, and the desperate struggle began anew. Elbert singled out the chief Negara, and determined that one of them should go down when the battle recommenced, and they met, each armed with a hatchet and knife.

Negara's appearance was terrific. He had been slightly wounded in several places, and the blood was streaming down his face and breast, and mingled with the red and white of his paint, giving him a grotesque and horrible appearance. He greeted the approach of Spencer by a shrill cry of joy, and rushed forward to meet him.

The *hakle* was now at its height. On all sides the opposing

borderers mingled in a deadly struggle, and as each had chosen his opponent, few were left at liberty to do more than attend to their own affairs.

Elbert and Negara approached each other cautiously, each having faith in the other's prowess, and neither being desirous of giving the last advantage. Elbert might have shot his opponent down, but, with that native chivalry which abhors in the breast of the men of the border, he would not take the advantage, but used only the same arms as his enemy. Their weapons clashed together, and while the hatchet of Negara was driven from his hand, the handle of Elbert's ax broke, leaving him as defenseless in that respect, and they stood face to face, armed only with bowies, dreadful weapons in experienced hands.

The active young borderer cut his enemy across the forearm deeply and sprung back, avoiding a blow which was aimed at his breast. Twice they had circled about each other and closed again, and this time both blades drank blood, although the wounds were slight.

In springing back, Elbert slipped in the blood of a fallen Indian, and staggered, and at the same time a savage, who was for the moment disengaged, struck him a stunning blow upon the head with a hatchet. The weapon turned in his hand, and but for that he had not needed another blow. As it was, his eyes were dim, and objects swam before them in a mist, and it was with difficulty that he warded off the blows of Negara, who was pressing him close.

The Indian who had struck him was approaching again, and he was stepping back hastily to get both enemies in front, when he stumbled over a dead body and fell to the earth. Knife and hatchet were lifted to finish the struggle, and the fate of the young man seemed sealed, when the wild hoot of Nat sounded in his ears and his long spear was driven completely through the body of the Indian with the hatchet. So sudden was his death that he remained standing in the attitude he had taken when struck, as if still alive. Nat planted his foot against his breast as he withdrew the spear and he fell in a ghastly heap, two yards away.

At the same moment the blow was struck, a little rifle cracked, and Negara felt the ball raise the feathers from his

head-dress. Lifting his eyes he saw Elsie standing a little way off, with the rifle smoking in her hand, while Long-armed Dan and his ten men were coming on to join in the fray, with triumphant cries.

He cast a hasty glance about him to see how the fortune of war stood. Half his men were down and the rest were struggling faintly against the rushes of the trappers who remained upon their feet. He felt that all was lost, and springing back he shouted to his men to follow, and those who could disengage themselves from their antagonist's did so. Wild Nat had not taken his eyes from the form of Nezua, and joined in the pursuit, striking down an enemy at every stride. Elbert had strength enough to wind his bugle and so recall the men from the pursuit, but they obeyed suddenly, and came back one by one, many of them concealing in their hunting-shirts the fearful trophies of the result of that terrible fray.

"Are you badly hurt, dear Elbert?" said the brave girl, bending over him. "Oh, tell me that you are not."

"I am all right, thanks to you, dear girl," said Elbert, rising. "But for your aid, and that of Wild Nat, I should have fared badly. Are the men coming back? See to the wounded first, Dan; I fear they are only too many."

"The doctor is at work already," said Dan, "but some of the boys are rubbed out--past all doctorin', you bet. Better have them see to your wounds first."

"My wounds will take care of themselves," replied Elbert. "There are others who need the doctor more than I. Get to work, Dan, and in the mean time keep a sharp lookout for the enemy. They may come back."

"Not they," replied Dan. "If they ain't got their fill of fighting for one night, them thar ar' no snakes in Virginia. You arter seen the gal Blaze away at Nezua. By the mighty, she cut the feathers out of his leadership, and he saved his scalp by a half-inch."

"What could I do, Elbert?" she said, softly. "His knife was raised above you, he was about to strike, and it was to save *your* life."

"I shall find a time to thank you better, dear one," he said. "Now I must see after my poor men."

He rose with an effort, and walked away with her by his side so took at the battle-field. It was a terrible one. Twenty dead men lay between the ravine and the woods, all from the assaulting force. As many more had fallen in the hand-to-hand struggle in the woods, and, to his great sorrow, nine of them were his own men, and among them, shot through the heart, was the Pawnee warrior, Matonah, who had joined them in spite of his wound.

Having set a guard over the different points which might be assailed, the young captain divided the rest into two parties, one of which dug a shallow trench in which they laid the dead of the enemy, side by side, and covered them with a layer of earth, piling stone above them to keep off the wolves until such time as their friends, if they so desired, could give them a better burial. Their own dead they buried in another place that their savage enemies might not be able to find and mutilate their remains. Neither party had any wounded who were not able to walk. In these terrible border frays to fall was death.

The terrible duty was performed, the dead laid in their last resting-place, and the survivors lay down to rest, little knowing whether they should see the coming of the morning. These strange men were careless in the face of terrible dangers. They could lie down to rest bathed in their own blood, even knowing that deadly enemies were making plans for their destruction, and perhaps gathering new forces to attack them, weak and worn as they were. Only Wild Nat could not rest. He had come back sullenly, from the pursuit, when recalled by the bugle of Elbert, and had since remained with his head buried in his hands, starting up now and then to peer out into the gloom, muttering to himself :

“ Red and white—red and white. Negara and Curt Melvin—Curt Melvin and Negara. Ha! ha! ha! What fools these wise men are.”

It was after three o’clock when Elbert went through the camp and aroused his men one by one by a touch. They understood him, for they had received their orders before lying down to rest. A single low blast of the bugle called in the guards, and they silently set to work getting up the

horses and saddling them. Last of all Elbert aroused the sleeping girl.

"Up, up, E'sie," he said; "it is time for us to go."

"Where; what do you mean?"

"Keep silent, for your life," he said, in a whisper. "There is no time to answer questions now, if we would escape from our enemies."

She allowed him to lift her to the saddle and followed him in silence as he led his horse down the slope to the east. Dan was in front leading his horse and showing the way, and the rest of the men brought up the rear, each with his hand upon his rifle, for they did not know how soon they might fall upon the enemy. At this moment Wild Nat started up and threw himself in the way.

"Look!" he said. "Nat knows that the pass is red with Blackfeet. Will you go there and be killed?"

"We must get out of this, somehow, Nat," replied Elbert.

"Then, let Nat show the way. He can find a path which the Indians never saw; and he will show it, for the angel's sake."

Elbert knew him too well to doubt that he spoke the truth. The direction was at once changed. Dan fell back, and Wild Nat took the lead.

CHAPTER VI.

A HUNDRED AGAINST ONE.

THE forces of Negara, with thinned ranks, made their escape by devious ways, followed by the shots and shouts of their enemies. It had been a desperate fight, and they felt the humiliation of defeat very keenly indeed, and none more than Negara. One by one the men came in, many desperately wounded, and the chief looked over his thinned forces with a thrill of rage. He was not used to defeat, and he felt it the more on that account. He had lost about half his followers, and the dreadful chant of the Indian warriors over their slain

was ringing through the valley in which they had found a shelter, nearly driving him mad.

A tall warrior, painted in motley colors, with the blood yet flowing from a deep cut in his shoulder, approached the chief, as he stood sullenly at the foot of a tree.

"Why does not Negara mourn with his brothers over the brave warriors who have fallen in this battle?" he said.

"Why should Negara weep?" was the reply. "They died in the smoke of the battle with their weapons in their hands, and their faces to the foe. We can not weep for such men; we can only avenge them."

"Negara speaks well," replied the warrior. "They have gone to the happy hunting grounds of our people, and chase the red deer by the beautiful river. As I sung the death-song over the slain, I heard their voices say, 'Strike for me; let not these white dogs rejoice in the death of brave men.'"

"The voice spoke well," said Negara. "Let my brothers be at rest, for all shall be well with them. Negara will take no rest until every man in yonder band has given his scalp to hang in a Blackfoot lodge."

"And shall the Wild Man of the Gulch die, too?"

"That shall be as my brothers say; but he deserves to die," replied Negara.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a new force of Blackfeet, who had intended to join them before, but had been detained in some way. It was well for Elbert Spencer and his party that they had not come in time to join in the battle, for they numbered one hundred well-appointed warriors, eager for battle. They were met with black looks by their friends, who had suffered by their delay.

"It is sad to tell," said the chief who led them, "and it is well for Negara to mourn. The Blackfeet have not wings to fly through the air, and they came as soon as they could. Let us not speak of those who are dead, but take revenge on the living."

"Let it be as you say," replied Negara, clutching his knife fiercely. "Ah, but for the woman who is with them, this knife would be red with the blood of the captain, Spencer. Remember, Barena, that I claim her for my own."

"It is good," said the Blackfoot. "Negara has some of

the blood of the white men in his veins, and it is well that he should choose a wife of that race. The white maiden shall be yours."

"And one thing more. The madman must die."

"It is good," replied the other. "My brother has spoken well, for the Blackfeet will not suffer one to live in all that band. The madman shall die, and Negara shall choose a way for him to die."

"Enough, chief; Negara would not ask any thing which was not for the good of the tribe. It is well that all these men should die, for the brood of the serpent will raise more young to trample upon Blackfeet graves. If you are ready, we will march at once."

"But my brother is hurt; he has lost blood."

"What care I? You will not find my arm weak in striking the foe in the battle that is to come."

Their plans were well laid, and their first work was to secure every pass leading from the cañon. Their forces were now so large that they could afford to be reckless, and they charged from all sides upon the sleeping camp. "But they charged shadows; of all the band of Spencer, not a man remained.

Raving in fury, Negara ran round and round the camp, vainly seeking for some trace of the enemy. The guards in the different passes had not been disturbed, so that they had not passed out that way; but gone they were, horses and all. So complete a disappearance was more than the Indians could understand, and they looked at one another in confusion and dismay.

"The hand of the bad Manitou is at work in this," said the chief, who had brought reinforcements to Negara. "What has he done while you slept? Have the white men taken the wings of the eagle to fly over the mountain, or have they dug into the earth, like the prairie-dog?"

"We must wait," replied Negara. "When morning comes, we will take their trail, and never leave until they are dead. Shall it not be so?"

"My brother has said it," replied the chief. "The Blackfeet never forget."

They lay down to rest under the trees, and waited for the

morning, which was not far away. In that dim hour, just before the day, when the senses seem most completely locked in slumber, they were aroused by a terrible cry of agony, as of a man mortally hurt, and started up. The camp was in confusion, those who were awake said that they had seen a vision of a gigantic, hairy monster, which bounded down the mountain-side, struck a swift blow or two, and was gone. That he had not come in vain was well attested, for two of the braves lay dead, pierc'd to the heart by some sharp instrument.

"It is the Spirit of the Rocks who fights for the white men," was the terrified murmur which ran through the camp.

"No!" said Negara. "It is the man the whites call Wild Nat, who hates us, and would kill us all if he could."

"Yes, yes, yes," yelled a voice from the darkness. "Wild Nat is here; why do you not come and take him?"

Half a dozen strong braves, at the command of Negara, bounded forth in pursuit, determined to slay Wild Nat or die. He met them at a narrow pass between the rocks, where only two could pass abreast, and through this retreated slowly, drawing the six Indians further and farther from the camp. As morning dawned, they were still in pursuit, but separated somewhat. He turned, at last, and killed the foremost by a stroke of his spear. Two others rushed upon him together, but he brained one by a thrust of the butt of his spear, and catching the other by the waist and shoulder, hurled him shrieking into a dark chasm a hundred feet in depth, and then rushed furiously upon the others. They were swift of foot, but their fleetness did not avail them against the tireless feet of Nat. Of the six braves who started out in pursuit the madman, not one came back, and the first notice the Indians had of their fate was seeing the wild man upon a rock high above them, waving five bloody scalps in the air.

"Five!" he cried, "five! The vultures have the other. Ha! ha! ha!"

Negara snatched a rifle and aimed at him, but Wild Nat knew him too well to give him a chance for a shot, although his wild laugh could still be heard. He was standing on the crest of a precipice a hundred and fifty feet above them, at a spot where a chamois could not have reached him from be-

low. While the Indians gazed in mute consternation, a great stone, loosened by the efforts of the madman, came bounding in erratic leaps down the side of the cliff, and taking a long leap from a granite boulder, swept two of their number into eternity, amid the terrible laughter of the madman.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shrieked Nat, wildly. "I've done it, I've done it! Who made me mad, who made blood flow, who made me a wild man of the hills? Hoo! yah! Look out for another!"

Even as he spoke another stone came crashing down, even greater in size than the first, and Negara could see that the madman could make the place absolutely untenable unless they could dislodge him, and they had no time to do that, and at the order of chief hurried away from the fatal spot.

"I'll follow—I'll watch," was the parting salutation. "Nat has the eyes of a panther and the heart of a grizzly, Negara and Curt Melvin—Curt Melvin and Negara! Ha! ha! ha!"

The Indians were perfectly frantic with rage, but what could they do? It was plain that the wild man knew more of the mountains than they did, and to pursue him would only be to expose more braves to death. The last they saw of Nat as they marched away he was laboring to detach another great stone and send it down upon them. He was too late, for the stone swept by a hundred feet behind the party.

"Who shall say that because the finger of the Great Spirit is laid upon this man we must not kill him?" said Negara. "But he must die no common death. Either one or the other of us has but a little time to live. Let the braves scatter and search for the trail of the white men, and when it is found, let the chiefs know."

Wild Nat still lingered upon the rocks above, and while the Indians searched the pass for the trail, he was on the alert, hurling stones at any who had the temerity to approach the cliff, which very few of them dared do. They found the trail at last, but it led them under the cliff, where the madman had collected a great supply of ordnance, and stood ready to launch them on the heads of the enemy, if they should attempt to pass. Negara began to see that he had an object in deterring the fight so desperately, and

knew that he must be driven away in order to allow the band to pass.

At his order twelve marksmen were selected, who took their stations within easy shot of the cliff, with orders to fire at the madman if he as much as showed a finger. This done Negara himself took the trail and hurried on, two or three of his bravest men following him. Nat was cunning enough to see that he could not lift his head above the rocks, but, lying prostrate on the earth, he pushed the stones he had gathered over with his feet in quick succession, and it was only by the exercise of extraordinary address that the chie escaped from the fearful shower alive.

Once past the point of rocks, the cliff was more broken and easier of ascent, and the three Indians sprung up the rocks, followed by others. But, when they reached the top of the ledge, the man they sought was no longer there. With that wonderful address and speed which made him so dangerous an opponent, he had disappeared, and the hard rocks did not show a footmark to guide them in the pursuit. Negara dropped the rifle which he held ready to shoot down their mad enemy, and looked at the others in wild surprise.

"The books of the white men speak of those in whose bodies devils dwelt, and made them terrible and strong. I never believed the tradition before; I believe it now," he said.

A wild laugh in the distance was the only response, and they knew that their subtle enemy was yet within hearing.

"This devil does not know what fear is," said Negara. "Let us go, and where we find the enemy, *he* will be there."

They descended, and again struck the trail, which was plainly defined, for the brigade, in the haste of last night, had not been able to cover it. The Blackfeet followed it like hounds eager for blood, but their ride came to an abrupt termination, for the trail ended suddenly at a rocky precipice, impassable even for horses.

In a rage the Indians rode up and down, vainly seeking for an outlet from the pass, and, in the midst of their perplexity, they heard again the mocking laughter of Wild Nat.

"Find it, find it! Nat knows the way, but he won't tell the Blackfeet. They are blind as bats. Ha! ha! ha!"

Again the rocks began to rattle down about their ears, for Nat took every opportunity to do them harm. He was not in sight, but his voice sounded upon the crest of the precipice in front. They rode back out of the dangerous vicinity many of them badly bruised, and in a raging mood against the madman, who thus met them at every turn.

"We have passed the spot where these white wolves burrow in the earth," said Negara. "They have doubled back at some place like foxes."

"I see no signs of turning back," said the man Wilson, who was with the party, and had just received a terrible bruise from a stone hurled by Nat. "But, this I will say, that, if you will give me leave, I'll go back and try to find the way out of this."

"Go if you will, but beware of Wild Nat, for he is on the watch."

Hank Wilson, who was a bold and desperate man, rode back to the spot where the trail seemed to have ended so abruptly. He had a pistol in his hand cocked and ready, and never removed his eyes from the summit of the cliff.

"Let me see the cuss show his head, that's all," he muttered. "I'll fix him."

But Nat did not see proper to show himself. On the contrary, nothing more was heard, and after waiting for a moment to satisfy himself that all was safe, Hank dismounted, and looked at the trail closely. He now saw that the party had fallen into single file, and had ridden so close to the base of the cliff that the red-skins had overlooked it in their haste, under the granite shower which Nat had sent down upon them. Pleased with this discovery, Hank rode along upon the trail until he found a place where there was a cleft in the wall of the pass, partly screened by low bushes. The trail led up to this and stopped.

"Goo!" muttered Hank. "I've got 'em dead to rights. I s'pose I ought to go in yer and make a sure thing of it before I call the rest."

He half turned his horse's head as if to ride into the bushes, and as he did so he caught a glimmer of steel,

and had just time to fling himself half out of the saddle, when the spear of Wild Nat whizzed through the air where his body had been a moment before. The trained buffalo horse bounded away, with Wilson hanging by one foot and hand, and carried him safely out of reach of Nat's weapons. He started up and seemed about to follow in pursuit, but stopped.

"No, no, there is not time. The angel in danger, and no one can save her but Wild Nat, the Gulch Terror. They fear me, ha! ha! ha!—they fear me, do they not?"

He could see Hank Wilson darting down the pass gesticulating wildly and shouting to his companions to come on. Nat saw that there was not a moment to lose, and, as the warriors began to move, he recovered his spear and climbed the rocks beside him, and when the Blackfeet reached the spot he was gone. But, in the place where he had been lying, parting the bushes, they saw a narrow path, through which they could see the open country far beyond.

CHAPTER VII.

NEGARA'S VOW.

THE brigade, led by the mad guide, had safely passed out of the toils their enemies had set for them, and were now camped in a circular valley, hardly three miles from the camp they had so lately occupied. On all sides arose the mighty ranges, green at the base, sterile farther up, their tops shrouded in clouds. Elsie Vedder had passed much of her life amid such scenes and she gloried in them, as evidences of the wisdom and power of the great Creator. The young girl was the idol of the camp, especially since her heroic conduct in the attack of the night before. They knew that they were not yet out of danger, but with that contempt of past perils which makes the men of the West so grand, the trappers gave themselves up to physical enjoyments. A deer and two antelopes had been brought in by the hunters, killed by means

of arrows—for Elbert had strictly forbidden the use of firearms for the present—while they were in the vicinity of such enemies as Negara and Curtis Melvin. Nat was out upon a scent, and had not yet returned.

The adoration of the fanatic for “the angel,” as he still persisted in calling Elsie, was something wonderful. To lie at her feet and watch her as the faithful dog watches his master, was his greatest delight. His rough face lighted up whenever she addressed him, and he listened to her words with a rapt surprise which was affecting to see. The rough borderers were touched by his manner, and many a whisper passed from man to man as they watched him.

“Nat ain’t got a bad heart, by no manner of means,” said Long-armed Dan, “or he wouldn’t have the good sense to love our Elsie and hate such black thieves as Curt Melvin. I say, Cap., don’t you think we’d do better to get out of this?”

“I am not going to be driven out of the foot-hills by Curt Melvin and that half-and-half thief, Negara,” replied the young man. “If it wasn’t for Elsie, I’d never have left our last camp.”

“It does seem mighty hard to have to run from such as him,” said Dan, “but it was good policy. We planted some mighty good boys in the cañon yester.”

“I know it, Dan, I know it. They were brave men and died fighting, but it hurts me to think that if I had not been so squeamish about letting Elsie see the trial of Curt Melvin, we never should have had to let him go.”

“Twas foolish in us,” replied Dan, “but, at the time, I thought you was in the right and so did every one in the camp. How they got round us and snatched up our Elsie I dunno; I’ll git even with that Hank Wilson for it, one of these days.”

“He is at least a bold villain, and deserves well at the hands of the Hudson Bay,” said Elbert. “Don’t you think it time for Nat to come in?”

“He is watching the inimy,” said Dan, “and he won’t come while he can do any good. They’d better be keerful how they cross his path. Hark!”

A low moaning cry was heard, such as Nat was known to

utter when approaching a camp, and soon after he was among them, his eyes shining fiercely behind his heavy brows.

"What is it, Nat?" said Dan. "Have you seen them, then?"

In answer, the madman opened the hairy covering on his breast and showed Dan what lay beneath.

"He's been raisin' ha'r," said Dan, coolly. "Now then, old feller, speak up. Hey they found the trail?"

Nat nodded his head slowly.

"Comin'?"

The wild creature nodded again.

"Nat has seen them, and some of them will never go on the war-trail again. Ha! ha! ha! They know what it is to hunt Wild Nat in his *own* hills."

"I reckon," said Dan. "Must we put out now?"

Nat shook his head, and seating himself before the fire snatched up a half-cooked rib of the deer, which was lying on the coals, and brushing off the ashes began to eat ravenously, like one who had fasted for a long time. Indeed, he had eaten nothing since the day before.

"Nat must eat—he must have strength," he said, as he tore off the rich, juicy meat with his strong teeth. "By-and-by he will go out again and meet the enemy. Curt Melvin and Negara. Ha! ha! ha! If they knew what Nat knows!"

"I'd rather board him for a week than a month," grumbled Dan, who had been cooking the ribs for himself. "Never mind; I hope he inj'ys the meat, and it does me good to see him eat. Break off two or three of them ribs for me, Tom; Nat has cleaned me out."

One of the men hacked off three of the ribs with a bowie, and gave them to Dan, who proceeded to cook for himself, while Nat stretched himself out upon the sed.

"Tain't no use to say a word to him now," said Dan, as Elbert was about to speak to the madman. "He won't say any thing to you."

Elbert turned to Elsie and whispered something to her, and she turned aside into the little shelter tent, which was carried wherever she went for her use, and came out a moment after, carrying a guitar in her hand. She sat down near the madman and touched the instrument with a gentle

hand, waking a sweet harmony, and then began to sing. At the first note Nat started up eagerly, and leaning on his elbow looked at her.

"Hush!" he said, waving his hand to the others. "No noise, for Nat must hear the song of the angel."

The song she sung was an old and touching ballad, of a man driven wild by his sorrows, and one which went to the heart of the wild man. It was the song known as the "Dismal Swamp." The crazed man beat the air with his hands as the touching melody proceeded, and not one of the rangers dared make a move, for they feared what might be done by Nat if they disturbed him. She began the last verses amid a strange silence, never moving her eyes from the face of Nat.

"Till he made him a boat of birchen bark,
That carried him off from the shore;
Long he followed that meteor spark,
The wind was high and the night was dark,
And the boat returned no more!
And oft by the Indian hunter's camp,
Those lovers so brave and true,
Are seen at the hour of midnight damp,
To cross the lake by their fire-fly lamp,
And paddle their light canoe.

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Nat. "I loved her dearly and she loved me, but she died. No, no, she was *killed*! Who killed her?" he shrieked.

He started to his feet and his eyes rolled wildly about him, but at the touch of Elsie's fingers upon the strings of the guitar he became calm again, and sunk down upon the earth at her feet.

"This poor man has been crazed by some great sorrow," said Dr. Sabin. "In my opinion, the loss of one he loved tenderly."

"Yes, that is it. Loved her beyond any thing else on earth, but she died—she died, and my brain gave way, and now I am only Wild Nat, the Gulch Terror. Wild Nat, the Mountain Devil, before whom the Indians tremble. Ha! ha! ha! Give me my spear and let me go out against them and kill them like dogs. All, all, *all* shall die!"

Again the fingers of Elsie pressed the strings, and his hand released its hold upon the left of the spear.

"Ask him about the Indians, Elsie," said Spencer. "He will tell you."

"Yes, Nat will answer when she speaks. What must I tell?"

"Where are the Indians who attacked us in the cañon?"

"They are coming," replied Nat. "They have found the pass."

"Have any more joined them?"

"Yes, many more. They are too strong for you now, and you must fly again. Nat will tell you where to go."

"Then, if you would have me escape from Curtis Melvin, show us the way at once."

Nat was on his feet in an instant, and beckoned them to follow.

"Quick, quick," he said. "Negara is swift of foot, and he is not far away. I seem to hear him now."

The fires were scattered; the brigade mounted and marched away. Not half an hour after the Indians surrounded the camp and rushed in, only to find, as before, that the nest was empty and the birds flown.

"It is the work of that thrice-accursed madman," said Hank Wilson. "He must not live or he will baffle all our plans."

"He is doomed," replied Negara; "but something whispers in my ear that when he goes I must go with him."

"Bah! shake off these coward fears, and be the one to strike him dead."

"A Prophet of the Blackfeet told me that my fate was to fall by the hand of one upon whom the finger of the Great Spirit had been laid," said Negara, in an awe struck tone. "Since that hour I have feared men who were mad, and something in my heart tells me that it was of the Gulch Terror the Prophet spoke."

"You are not the man to be made a fool of by a random prophecy of an Indian medicine-man," said Wilson. "If you are, by heaven I will follow you no longer."

"Can you say that my arm is weak in battle, or that I am slack in the hour of danger?" demanded Negara, fiercely.

"No; you are brave enough."

"Then talk not to me until I turn back like a coward,"

said the chief. "If I must die, I must die, and it is not in the power of man to change the decrees of fate. Why are we wasting time here? Let us follow and crush out these white dogs who have killed our comrades."

"That is the kind of talk that suits me, Negara," said Wilson, "and while you talk it I am your man."

"The chief, Barena, wishes to speak with Negara," said an Indian, coming up.

"Let him come to me, then," replied the half-breed. "I am waiting for him."

The chief came forward, accompanied by a stunted old man in the fantastical dress of a medicine-man, wearing various amulets and charms about his person, and painted in ridiculous colors. At the sight of him Negara turned pale, his terror showing itself beneath his paint.

"You, you, Prophet? Why have you come to Negara?"

"The Spotted Cat is the great Medicine of the Blackfeet," replied the strange creature, in the Indian tongue. "He has been down among the caves of the dead, seeking for charms to make the tribe mighty in war, and to teach them how to sweep the White Destroyer from the face of the earth. While he slept in the caves under the mountain, a dream came to him, and he has come to speak it in the ears of Negara, chief of the Blackfeet."

"Why has the Spotted Cat come to me?" demanded the chief.

"Because he would save the best men of the tribe from death. A spirit came to me in my dream and whispered in my ears, 'Fly to Negara, the War-Chief, and to Barena, the Night Cloud, and warn them to turn back and fight no more, until the moon is full.'"

"It is a lying message, Spotted Cat," said Negara, "and must not be obeyed."

"It must be obeyed, or the pride of the Blackfeet must lie in the dust."

"It is a message from the spirits who watch over the white men," replied Negara, who saw that many even of his own band were troubled by the message. "Some bad spirit would save them from the hatchets of the Blackfeet."

"It is a good message," screamed the Spotted Cat, "and

the spirit was good. The white men have no spirits in the caves of the dead, where the Spotted Cat dreamed the dream. Men of the tribe, I have seen visions and wonders, and all speak of death to Negara and his men, and to Barena, if he does not listen to the words of the Spotted Cat and turn away from the path his feet are treading."

"It is a lying voice," replied Negara, waving the Prophet away. "Spotted Cat has lied to Negara before."

"When?" shrieked the medicine-man. "Say when, Sioux, traitor?"

"When you spoke of the death before me. Go; I have heard your words, and they are those of a coward who would let the bones of the dead cry out in vain for vengeance from bloody graves. Before the moon is full, the white men will be safe where we can do them no harm."

"The voice of the Prophet has been good in the ears of the tribe, Negara," said Barena, who had not before spoken. "Let us believe him now."

"Are you a coward too, Night Cloud?" said Negara, sneeringly.

"Barena has carried too many scalps to the village where he dwells to bear the name of a coward," replied the warrior. "Negara speaks falsely."

"If you turn back now, then you are a coward; if you go on, you are a brave warrior, and Negara will unsay his words."

"Words can not make a chief a dog," answered the Blackfoot, quietly. "I have listened to the words of a Prophet, and they have a sweet sound in my ears. Barena will go no further until the moon is full."

Rage was depicted upon the countenance of Negara as he saw the enemies he sought so suddenly redeemed by the cowardly conduct of the chief. His hands opened and closed upon his hatchet, and it seemed for a moment that he would immolate the Prophet upon the altar of his vengeance.

"Ha!" he cried; "are all the Blackfeet the sons of dogs, to turn back with the enemy in sight? You who are friends to Negara and who will avenge the slain of yesterday, come away from cowards and stand beside me!"

About half his own band heard the summons and came

to his side, and nearly all were half-breeds, not so open to superstition as the pure Indian.

"No more!" he said. "Then let these kneel with me and swear to the Great Spirit that we will not give up the pursuit of these white dogs until their scalps are ours or we are dead."

At this moment a deep thunder peal sounded from the cloud upon the mountain's brow. Before the Prophet could speak, Negara forestalled him.

"The Great Spirit hears us, my brothers. Let us fall upon our knees before him and make the vow."

They kneeled with uplifted hatchets, and twenty more came from Barena's force and bowed with them. A ray of light piercing the cloud above them fell upon their upturned faces as the vow was made.

CHAPTER VIII.

CURTIS MELVIN'S TRIUMPH.

THREE days passed, and the brigade had heard nothing from their enemies. They had disappeared as suddenly as they had come, and the most skillful scouts in the brigade could make nothing of it. Whatever had turned them aside from the tracks of the party, it became patent to all that they were gone, though where it was they could not tell.

Nat had introduced them into another almost impenetrable fastness, which only he knew, and here they would have felt comparatively safe, even if the enemy had remained in that vicinity. Once satisfied that Negara had drawn off his forces for the present, they set about the duty for which they had come out, and were successful beyond their highest hopes. Nat knew the haunts of the beaver and otter, and introduced them to streams of which the best scouts knew nothing, but which he, who had spent years in roaming through the mountain region, had become familiar with.

"Nat knows them all," he would say. "He knows where

the beaver lives, and will tell Elbert, because the angel loves him, but he would not tell any one else. The beavers are wiser than men, and Nat knows them, and has sat on the bank and talked to them while they built their houses. They build well, the cunning beavers."

They finally made a camp in one of the cañons, and from this, exploring parties went out in various directions, guided by Nat and Dan, and in a week's time they had found beaver-dams enough to keep them all in employment the coming season. As the days went on, and nothing more was heard from Negara or Curtis Melvin, they became lulled into a sense of false security, as trappers are only too apt to be, and relaxed their vigilance somewhat, when Elbert or Dan was not there to keep them in order. Even they began to think that their enemies had lost track of them, or had withdrawn their forces voluntarily, and after ten days, nothing more was thought of them.

It was afternoon upon the twelfth day, and most of the trappers were out of camp, some upon exploring expeditions and others after game, for it had been decided to break up the camp on the morrow and strike out for the fort. Five men only besides the young captain were in the camp, when Nat came down the mountain side alone.

"Come, Elbert, come," he said. "You want to see the home of the beaver, and Nat will show you; Nat has found it."

"Can not I go too, Nat?" said Elsie, springing to her feet eagerly.

"The path is rough for tender feet," said the lunatic, "and we must go on foot. The angel had better stay here, though Nat would love to have her with him."

"I think he is right, Elsie," said Elbert. "You know that we march to-morrow, and you have had many a tramp about the mountains during the past week."

"Just as you say, Elbert," she replied, pouting. "If you don't want me to go with you, of course I will stay."

"It is not that, Elsie," said Elbert. "I would do any thing to please you, but as Nat says the path is difficult, I think you had better stay."

"I will stay, Elbert," she replied, "and I did not mean what I said."

"Then good-by for the present, my dear girl. I will soon be back, you may be sure of that."

Nat led the way up the mountain side, and as they proceeded, Elbert was very glad that he had not been persuaded to allow Elsie to accompany them. The utmost exertion was necessary to enable them to climb the mountain path, although Nat, assisting his progress with his spear, which he always carried, got on with greater ease than the younger man.

Their course was upward; plateau after plateau was passed, until they crossed one of the higher notches of the mountain, and began to descend upon the other side. The descent was more quickly accomplished, although great care was still necessary, and they came at last to a ledge which overlooked one of those strange streams, the heads of our mighty rivers, which rise in the mountain regions. On each side of the stream was a narrow patch of green, and as Elbert crept to the edge and looked down the straight cañon through which the stream forced its way, he saw that it was a mere succession of beaver-dams, and expanded at regular distances into those miniature lakes formed by these sagacious animals. Hundreds of them were disporting in the water, performing strange antics and beating the water into foam with their broad tails. Just below them a colony of the wonderful creatures were engaged in building a dam. They had felled the tree across the stream almost as skillfully as a man could have done it, and were now planting the stakes and chinking up the crevices with mud, working like skillful masons. Although Elbert had done a great deal of trapping in his day, it had never been his good fortune to find a colony of beaver at work upon a new dam, and he was almost sorry that he had not suffered Elsie to come with him, that she might have the pleasure of beholding the strange sight, and he was almost tempted to wait another day and bring her here for the purpose.

"Nat knows the beavers and the beavers know Nat," said the wild man, in a low whisper. "Ha! ha! look at the old king sitting on the bank and telling them what to do."

It did indeed seem as if the staid old beaver whom he pointed out was king of the dam, for there was an air of au-

thority in all his motions, and of implicit obedience on the part of his followers, which was simply amusing, and at the same time instructive. He seemed to send the different members of his family here and there, and what is more, they understood what he wanted and did the work at once. It was a sight to see the beavers pile the mud upon the broad flat tails of their companions, and then see them gravely set out and drag it to the point which seemed to need it most accompanied by the "king," who took a monarch's interest in what was going on.

Elbert looked on, highly amused, for some time, while Nat kept up his whispered comments upon the proceedings, laughing to himself as he told of the times he had spent beside the stream, watching the beaver at their work. Elbert knew that a great amount of wealth was before his eyes in the various beaver-dams, waiting only for the skill of the trappers to draw it forth. He had performed his duty; had found fresh grounds for the labor of the brigade during the coming season, and nothing was left for him to do but return and report to the company's officers his great success.

"Elbert is glad to see the beavers," said Wild Nat, "and Nat is glad to show them to him because he is kind to Nat and loves the angel. Let us go back, and when we have taken the angel to the fort, where she will be safe, we will return and trap the beavers and catch Curt Melvin and hang him up in the sight of the buzzards."

"That is what I intend to do, Nat," replied the young captain. "Let's be getting back, for we ought not to leave the camp too long under the care of five men, and rather lazy ones at that, or they would be out on the hills."

They again began the ascent, and were part way up, when they heard the crack of rifles in the valley on the other side.

"Confound them! How dare they fire rifles after what I told them? Do the fools want to bring the Indians after us?"

A confused sound of firing came up from the valley, and Albert grew pale as a horrible doubt began to force itself upon him. Had the Indians attacked the camp, or what was the cause of the confusion? Nat uttered one of his wild cries and bounded up the mountain at a terrible pace, and the

young man, straining every nerve, bounded after him until they reached the summit, from which the valley lay in fair view before him, a mile away, but the spot where the camp was set was hidden from his view by the intervening trees. Elbert raised the bugle to his lips and sounded the call to bring in his straggling men, even as he rushed down the mountain some distance behind Wild Nat, who was going in long leaps which it was impossible to imitate. On they went, and as their feet struck the level, Nat shook his terrible spear and dashed furiously forward, and as he passed the woods, the old hills rang with the cry he uttered. Elbert sprung to his side, and saw in a moment that he was too late.

Scattered about the sward in various positions, their weapons clasped in their dead hands, lay the five men who had been left to keep camp, scalped and gory. They had fought hard, for the earth was bloody in many places, and although the Indians had carried off their dead, they never could have conquered those five men without losing some of their number. But, where was Elsie? Had they killed her, too, and had her bright young life come to a bloody end? Nat ran here and there with his face bent near the earth, looking with strange intentness upon the ground, studying the trail.

"Can you give me hope, Nat?" gasped Elbert. "Oh, tell me that she is not dead."

"Not dead—oh—no. Better dead than where she is!"

"Who has taken her? Can you tell me that, you to whom the earth is an open book?"

"Curt Melvin has been here," replied Nat, pointing to a footprint on the earth. "Curt never sleeps when he seeks vengeance. Nat has followed his trail too far not to know it when he sees it."

"What is to be done?"

"Nat will go—will follow the trail and tell where they go. He has an ear like a hound and an eye like an eagle. He can tell where a mouse has stepped upon the grass, and can he not follow the course of heavy feet? Look here!"

Near the body of one of the slain men an arrow had been thrust into the ground, and fluttering on it was a bit of pa-

per. Nat took it off and gave it to Elbert, who read it with a brain which seemed on fire.

"To ELBERT SPENCER, LONG-ARMED DAN, and all whom it may concern:

"Having occasion for the society of the young lady called Elsie Vedder, who has for some time been allowed to remain in your camp, I have induced her to leave it. You will remember that the young lady is my promised wife, and I only seek my own. Any foolishness which may have come into the heart of your captain is now set at rest forever, as the young lady will never return. You may say to her reputed father, Peter Vedder, that I will take at least as good care of her as he can. With many protestations of esteem, and sorrow for your loss, I remain truly yours, CURTIS MELVIN."

This diabolical note, so skillfully written, drove Elbert nearly mad. The men came hurrying in at the call of the bugle, but stood appalled as they saw their unfortunate comrades dead upon the sod, and they began to make wild queries as to how this had happened. To all this there was but one answer—Curtis Melvin!

"But we kain't let it go so," said Long-armed Dan. "I for one ain't goin' back to the fort without our Elsie. I dare not face Peter Vedder and tell him we let his darter git stole away by that consarned critter."

"Nat will go," said the wild man. "He will find them, and when they are found he will come back to you."

"That's the only chalice," said Dan. "I kin trail some but Nat kin beat me. Now my idee is to set him on the trail and let him foller it as fast as he kin while we stay what we ar' and wait for him."

"I can not wait," cried Elbert. "I must go with him."

"You'll only hamper him, Elbert. He kin travel as fast ag'in as you, and it won't do. If any one is to go with him, I'm the only one that can keep up with him on a long trail. And, come to think of it, I'd better go, for when we find 'em one must stay to watch while the other goes back to warn you."

"Your plan is a good one," said Elbert, "and I will try to restrain myself. Waste no time then, but be off at once. The rest of you bring spades and let us bury these poor lads who have fallen. Good-by, Dan; good-by, Nat, and be careful, for you know how much depends on you."

The two strange scouts hurried away together, and slowly and sorrowfully the others set to work burying their dead.

Elsie, after the young captain had gone from the camp, had amused herself for some moments with her guitar, and was picking out an improvised air, when she was startled by an oath from one of the trappers and saw him spring to his feet and discharge his rifle at a body of men who were rushing furiously upon the camp. At a glance she recognized them as part of the force which had captured her before, and foremost among them rode Curtis Melvin and Hank Wilson. The other trappers sprung up and discharged their rifles and three of their enemies went down; and then, seeing nothing for it but to sell their lives dearly, hatchets and revolvers were drawn and a terrible fray, five to fifty, was at once commenced. Elsie saw her brave defenders the center of a wild mass of tossing arms and glittering steel; pistols cracked, oaths, cries and groans intermingled, and when the mad fray was over they lay dead upon the sod, and their scalps hung in the belts of the fierce warriors who had slain them. A moment after Melvin pushed his horse to her side, and bowed low before her, showing his white teeth in a manner which was any thing but pleasing.

"And thus we meet again, my dear Elsie!" he said, in a jocular tone. "I told you when we parted that you should see me once more."

"Coward; you have murdered these brave men in cold blood."

"Cold? Hardly so, my dear Elsie. I never heard any one accuse these Indians of being particularly cold-blooded. Hank, come this way, please."

Wilson rode up with a grin upon his dark face.

"This lady is in your charge, Hank. Take good care of her and get her a horse, for she has consented to ride with us. How many of our lads did these fellows put down?"

"Four killed and seven wounded," replied Hank. "One of the wounded has got his gruel."

"Even up, eh? A life for a life. It seems to me we might have put five men on their backs without losing so many, but they fought like demons. Get me an arrow, Baida."

One of the half-breeds brought him an arrow, and dismounting he tore a leaf from a note-book and wrote the letter to Elbert, thrust the arrow through it, and pushed it into the earth where it was found.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT IN MELVIN'S CAMP.

ELsie looked hastily about her, calculating the chances of escape, and was just about to make an attempt at flight, when Hank Wilson touched her on the arm.

"Don't try it, my lady," he said. "It won't do you any good, for I should have you ag'in in half a jiff. Better take it easy, since you've got into trouble, and don't make Curt angry, for there's no telling what he mout do in such a case."

"I wish to speak to him; tell him so at once."

"Here he comes; tell him so yourself. Curt, hi! Lady wants to speak to you."

"I am quite at your service, Elsie," said Melvin, familiarly, sauntering up with a jaunty air. "Sorry to put you to any inconvenience, but these fellows deserved all they got. May I ask where Spencer is?"

"Thank Heaven he was not here, Curtis Melvin—you would have murdered him."

"And, pray, what did he intend to do with me when he caught me the other day? I should have showed him the same mercy he meant for me, of course."

"Your vengeance is satisfied now, I hope, and you will let me go free."

"Satisfied! When every man of his accursed party is dead, then, and only then, shall I be satisfied. And as to letting you go, that is out of the question. Have you forgotten that you once promised to be my wife?"

"I have forgotten nothing I once promised, neither have I forgotten that you yourself opened my eyes to your sinful heart. There is nothing in common between us, and I must detest you all my life long."

At this moment they heard the yell of Wild Nat, as he leaped up the mountain side from the beaver stream. As he heard it, Melvin became ghastly pale, and turned hurriedly to his companions.

"Do you hear that, lads?" he said. "The shots have roused them and they are coming. Let's be off at once. That is the voice of the Gulch Terror."

"You fear Wild Nat, and with good cause," said Elsie. "Coward! murderer! I will not go with you!"

"Will not?" he hissed. "Living or dead, you go with me. Bid good-by to Elbert Spenceer, for you have seen him for the last time."

"Keep off!" she cried. "Do not touch me, as you value your life!"

She laid her hand upon the little revolver she carried, but at a signal from Melvin, Hank Wilson seized her by both arms from behind, and held her fast.

"I reckon you'd better take that little toy away from her, Curt," said the desperado, quietly. "She's got spunk enough to use it right smart, if she got a chance."

Melvin advanced and took the revolver and knife from her belt, and placed them in his own.

"Children should never be allowed to play with edged tools," he said. "Bring up a horse here, Barda. The rest of you get out of this as soon as you can, and leave me to manage the girl."

The Indians were quickly in the saddle, and Wilson and Melvin placed the struggling girl upon her own horse which had been brought up, and rode away, keeping her horse between them. She cried out once, when they gagged her, making it impossible for her to give an alarm, and they disappeared in one of the many passes which led into the valley, just as Nat and Elbert appeared upon the scene. From this point they rode hard, and at nightfall were back in familiar scenery, upon the spot where the Prophet had parted the forces of Barena and Negara.

"Camp down," said Melvin. "I'll take charge of the girl. Now, my dear, I don't wish to be harsh with you, but will you agree not to run away, if I don't tie you?"

"No."

"You intend to try to escape?"

"The very first opportunity."

"Your pride must have a fall, my lady," he said, fiercely. "I will teach you that you are to have no will but mine, when you are my wife."

"That shall never be, if knives are sharp and waters will drown."

"You would destroy yourself sooner than marry me?"

"Yes; I will never be your wife."

"This is your decision?"

"It is."

"There are worse fates than even that of becoming my wife," he said, slowly.

"I can think of none."

"There is a Blackfoot chief who has a sort of claim upon you which he waived in my favor. You have seen him—Negara."

She uttered a cry of horror, as she remembered the horrible face of that redoubled warrior, as he bent over Elbert in the act of striking a knife into his heart.

"It is simply a matter of taste," said Melvin, coolly. "Much as I would prefer to marry you myself, I must give you up to him in case you are obstinate. In fact, I passed my word to him that I would do so."

"You can not mean it. This is too horrible even to think of."

"Doubtless it looks so to you. Now Negara is a sort of Indian Adonis, and the handsomest women of the tribe are eager to come into his bed. You are very hard to please."

"You are not a man—you are a fiend, Melvin. You do this simply to annoy me and make me wretched."

"You have never annoyed me, I suppose," he said. "But I have said enough to-night and will leave you. Shall send you any thing to eat?"

"No; I could not swallow a morsel of food."

"You will need strength, even to run away," he said. "By the way, I will introduce you to your guards."

He whistled, and two ferocious-looking wolf-hounds, with blood-shot eyes, came bounding up to him, and laid their broad muzzles into his outstretched palms.

"These two beauties will lie near you to-night, my dear girl, and I would not advise you to wander too far from the camp, or they may bring you back in a way which will not suit you."

"Take them away, for pity's sake. Do not let them touch me, Melvin."

"I am glad to have found a vulnerable point in your character, my lady," he said. "So you do not like my two friends, Lion and Terror?"

"I can not bear the sight of them. Take them away, I beg of you."

"They won't hurt you unless you try to run. You had better let me leave them near you and they will save you the trouble of making a promise which you might break. You know you broke a promise made to me once."

"It was your own act. I loved you then, Curtis, why deny it. I thought you a good and noble man, but when I saw you as you are, I cast you aside as I would any unholy thing."

"Exactly; and as you would forget your promise if I were weak enough to trust to it to-night, since you object to the dogs, I will try to find other guards."

He went away, and shortly after, two Indians came and spread some dry leaves and moss under a tree, and threw some blankets upon it, and signified to her that it was here that she was to pass the night. She could make nothing by resistance, so she sat down on the blankets, leaning against the tree, and the Indians sat down not far away, one upon each side of her, immovable as statues, and sleepless to all appearance, as owls at night. Whenever she looked up, they sat in the same position, their eyes fixed upon her watchfully. After a time, fatigue got the better of her, and throwing one of the blankets over her, she lay down with her head resting on her rounded arm, and was soon fast asleep. As she lay there in her innocence and beauty, Curtis Melvin, who had been seated by one of the fires, in deep thought, arose and came toward her, and leaning against the tree, looked down into the sleeping face with a strange expression in his own.

"Innocence—yes," he muttered, "both innocent and good. This girl has it in her power to change all, to make

me another sort of being; but can she give me back the good name I once had, can she wipe out the many crimes with which my life is stained? And she hates me; ah, I deserve it at her hands."

He stirred uneasily in her sleep, and murmured a name, and as he bent to listen, he heard that of his rival, Elbert Spencer, and a look of rage came into his face.

"That young hound shall not have her, at least. I would have hanged me, hanged me like a dog, and his nose would have looked on and laughed. Curse him, I will have my revenge upon him, and what better than this?"

He remained for nearly half an hour looking down upon the sleeping face, and then moved away and lay down under the shelter of a bush, scarcely twenty feet away. A life of wandering had made the man careless of exposure, and he slept as sweetly as if his pillow had been of down, instead of the hard earth of the cañon.

The camp was at rest, and nothing moved save where an Indian stalked out in silence to take the place of another, whose time of guard duty was over. The rest slept soundly by their fires save where now and then one of them sat up, lighted his pipe at the embers of the fire and smoked stolidly before lying down to rest again. It might have been midnight, when the camp was aroused by a fearful cry of agony, and every man started to his feet, thinking that the enemy was upon him. Twenty or thirty of the savage band seemed to be struggling together in the center of the glade, and then they were burst asunder as though an earth-quake had passed through, and a gigantic figure rushed out and was lost in the darkness. One remained, prostrate upon the earth, but not alone, for three figures lay scattered about who would never rise again. They dragged the prisoner to his feet and brought him forward to the light of the fire and saw that it was Long-armed Dan, the scout.

"Ha, my friend," said Melvin, "I am glad to see you."

"I wish I could return the compliment, Curt," replied Dan, "but in justice to my good sense I kain't do it."

"Do you know that you have put yourself into the lion's jaws?"

"A lion's a polecat, you mean. Why, rot me all to pieces

ef you don't disgrace the noble animile I speak of by makin' yerself the ekal of it."

" You have a long tongue as well as long arms, my lad. Perhaps we may find a way to make you wag it less."

" Who keers? You've got me, an' that's enuff. I tried to git that pritty gal out of yer claws an' failed. I ain't the only one she hez on her side, you bet."

" Oh, Dan, my brave fellow," said Elsie. " I am so sorry for you."

" I ain't got nothin' to say 'bout it, Miss Elsie," said Dan. " Good Lord, I hope I know how to stand grief as well as another man, an' ef I've got to go under I reckon I kin stand it. He ain't goin' to skeer Long-armed Dan, nohow he kin fix it."

" Tie him neck and heels, Hank," said Melvin. " We will attend to his case in the morning."

" An' dig a hole to plant your carrion in, too, you useless thief," roared Dan. " Wagh! What a lot of polecats, half-an'-halfs an' prary-wolfs the Blackfoot nation kin turn out when it tries. It's enuff to make a man forgit his parints when he sees it."

A growl of rage ran through the ranks of the followers of Melvin, and Dan smiled, for, knowing that they would torture him in the morning, he wished to provoke them to give him an easy death at once.

" Hoss-thieves, mushrat-eaters an' diggers! A Pawnee like Matonah could lick the hull b'ilin' of you in two minutes by the capt'lin's watch. Ef I hadn't got my feet tangled in a lariat I'd hev cleaned out the hull party—I would, by molarity, yes!"

" Dan, Dan," said Elsie. " You are making them angry."

" They can't git mad, Miss Elsie. I'm doubtful ef that's a min among 'em that ever struck any thing bigger than a ground-hog. That big thief with the grizzly claws round his neck never got 'em fair." Then, speaking in the Indian tongue: " He stole them from a bear I killed; he had not the heart to kill for himself."

The Indian he referred to, a ferocious-looking savage with a necklace of bear's claws, uttered a howl of rage at this announcement. No insult which Dan could have uttered would

lave struck so deep as this, for his reputation was built upon the very trophy to which the scout so insultingly pointed, and Dan knew it. In an instant a naked hatchet gleamed in the hand of the Indian, and Long-armed Dan closed his eyes, but, with a leap like a panther, Melvin bounded into the circle and clutched the Indian by the arm.

"Stand back!" he cried, in a voice of thunder, in the Indian tongue. "Lay not a finger on him, for your lives."

"I know'd they wouldn't hev the pluck to do it," said Dan. "Pshaw! I'm 'shamed because I killed this chap."

And he spat in the face of the dead Indian who lay at his feet. His companions made a simultaneous rush at the bold scout, and with uplifted hatchets strove to cut him down. The half-breeds and disguised white men rushed between them and their prey and beat them back by force.

"By the big horn spoon," said Dan. "You chaps is mighty hard to suit. I thought I'd insulted you enuff. How does *that* suit, then?"

And he spat in the face of Curtis Melvin who was near him. The desperado turned livid but said not a word, but pressed back the Indians, shouting to his immediate followers to stand firm.

"Men of the Blackfeet," he cried, "you shall have your revenge in the morning, but not now. Stand back, I say!"

They at last withdrew sullenly, and Dan, bound hand and foot, was left alone at the mercy of the wild band. For a few moments the tumult had been frightful, and the confusion great, and none of the band but had been mixed up in it more or less.

"You are mine," hissed Melvin, "and in the morning I shall claim my revenge. This mark shall not be wiped from my face until I can wash it clean in your blood."

"Just as you say, Melvin, but I'd rather you finished me *at once*."

Melvin shook his finger at him menacingly, but made no other sign, and turned away. Then, for the first time he thought of Elsie and looked about for her, and then a cry of rage burst from his lips.

In the confusion of the struggle she had made her escape!

CHAPTER X.

FEARFUL SENTINELS.

WILD NAT and Long-armed Dan had followed the trail of the villains who had broken up the camp and carried away Elsie, and were surprised to find they made no effort to cover their trail, all their movements indicating a sense of security, and a contempt of any thing the brigade could do to injure them, and they came suddenly in sight of the camp, after the fires had been lighted and the guards set. Approaching, as only skillful scouts know how to do, they crept near and looked into the sleeping camp. When Curtis Melvin approached and looked down into the sleeping face of Elsie, they were not twenty yards away, lying prostrate behind a bowlder, watching him intently. The scoundrel little knew how near he was to death that night, for the finger of Dan was three times upon the trigger of his rifle, and he was only restrained from firing by the thought that Elsie would be in greater danger without the protection of Melvin than she was with him alive. At least he would protect her from all others, as he loved her himself.

They remained quiet, until the man went away and lay down to rest. But the Indian guards did not move, sitting like statues gazing at their charge. Dan thought if they could once get Elsie safely out of camp they could escape into the mountains and manage to elude their pursuers. But, could it be done?

He looked at Nat and saw that he was trembling in every limb, though not with fear. The crazed being could understand that they dared not do Melvin any injury while Elsie was a prisoner, and yet it required the effort of all his will to refrain from springing forward and plunging his spear into his body. The two guards were nodding, and after a little stretched themselves upon the earth and were soon fast asleep.

"Them chaps ain't Injuns," thought Dan. "They wouldn't go to sleep—they ain't in it."

The scouts exchanged looks, and began to creep nearer to the sleeping girl, keeping the great tree between them and the fire. They were just about to attempt to rouse her, when a heavy body descended on the back of Dan, with an Indian exclamation, followed by the appalling war-whoop. Dan shook him off, and his bowie flashed, and when he drew it back it was deeply dyed in the blood of the Indian, who fell dead to the earth. Both now sprung up and would have fled, but, as if touched by a magician's hand, every Indian bounded to his feet and surrounded them.

The result we know. Wild Nat broke out and escaped, when he saw that Dan was down and overpowered by many enemies, and in the confusion which followed, Elsie also slipped away and fled like a spirit into one of the many passes of the mountains. She had only one thought, and that was to put as much distance as possible between herself and her enemies. The night was not very dark, and she was out of sight before her escape was discovered, but she heard the shout which arose when she was missed, and knew that she would be pursued.

It was well for her that her forest training had made her active and strong of limb, and she ran at a speed which would have troubled most men to imitate. The course she took was over a rocky path where no scout could trace her, but she had not the most distant idea where she was or into what dangers she was hurrying. It was enough for her that she took a direction which was leading her away from Melvin's camp, even though she starved in the mountains. She heard the sound of voices in pursuit, and knew that some of them were taking the same course with her, and they had torches. As she hurried on in the darkness she stumbled over a stone and fell, and to her horror, she found herself falling into a cleft in the rock. Before she had time to think, she was sliding down a sloping rock, and landed safe, although somewhat bruised upon a hard, rocky floor. Scarcely had she regained her feet when she heard the rush of coming footsteps, and paused as she was about to make an attempt to climb up out of the cavity, preferring to take her chances of remaining hidden in this place, to facing foes so close at hand.

The footsteps came near, and paused a moment near the chasin, as if to listen; some words were spoken in the Indian language, and then the men, for there were two at least, hurried on up the mountain pass. Elsie was about to creep out of her place of concealment, when the entrance to the place was darkened, and she hastily retreated, and for the first time became conscious that she was in some sort of a cave, and of considerable depth. She began to grope her way back cautiously, her heart beating wildly, and found that the floor was hard and smooth, but a sickening, fetid smell arose from the walls about her, and for the first time she realized that she was in the den of some wild beast, and the conviction forced itself upon her that it might return and find her there. It was a horrible thought, and filled with a vague dread, she retreated further and further into the cavern, until she no longer inhaled the fetid odor of the wild beasts' lair.

A scratching noise was heard at the entrance to the cave, and shortly after, a bulky body slid down the inclined plane, with a rasping, metallic sound as the claws dug into the limestone rocks. Filled with fear, she ran back hastily, and found her way stopped by a barrier of solid rock, with shelving projections here and there. The beast, whatever it might be, was not alone, for three other huge bodies came tumbling down, two of them of smaller size, but even the smallest looming up vaguely through the gloom of the place. All at once the thought struck her that these could be only that terror of the mountains, the Grizzly and his family.

At this horrible conviction, she felt herself grow faint, but recovered herself by a powerful effort of the will, and began to think of ways and means of escape. Feeling about on the rock with a cautious hand, she became convinced that the first shelf, some two feet from the floor, was wide enough for her to stand on, and she stepped up carefully and felt for another projection upon which she could set her feet. She found them, one after another, and continued to ascend until she was satisfied that she must be at least twenty feet above the floor of the cavern, and paused for breath. From her elevated perch, she could plainly see the huge beasts gamboling about on the stone floor, the old bears lying down

and the playful cubs rolling over them in various uncouth ways, uttering their peculiar note when in sport. The place where Elsie now stood, was some two feet wide, and she sat down to rest, satisfied that the bears did not suspect her presence, and that for the present she was safe. But how would it be when daylight shone into the place, and they began to wander about in search of food?

It was nearly three o'clock, and it must be three hours before she could have light enough to realize her terrible situation, or to make any effort, if such an effort were possible, to escape from the trap into which she had fallen.

What a night she passed, perched upon that narrow shelf, waiting for the light to show her whether she was devoted to death, or had the slightest chance of escape!

The light came slowly on, and the bears began to move, and she could see where she was. The shelf to which she had climbed was near the roof of the cavern, which was hung here and there with limestone stalactites. The restless cubs were wandering here and there, and one of them was slowly drawing himself from ledge to ledge toward her. The old bears were still sleepy, though now and then they raised their terrible heads, as the cub which remained upon the floor bounded over them playfully, and uttered low growls, showing their ugly fangs. The climbing cub had seen Elsie, that was evident, and was coming up for a nearer inspection, not wishing to create unnecessary alarm.

There was something ludicrous, even in the extremity of terror, in the appearance of this fat young rover, as he dragged his heavy body from ledge to ledge, with his head turned knowingly to one side, and his eye fixed upon the intruder to his domain. He was going up to see about it, and if there was any thing wrong, he proposed to report at once to papa and mamma, who were taking matters so coolly down below.

Elsie crept cautiously back upon the platform, and found a place where she could be out of sight of her horrible neighbors below, and which her inquisitive young friend could not reach, except by standing upright and stretching his limbs to their fullest extent. She heard him growling in a dissatisfied manner at her sudden disappearance, and directly after a comical head showed itself above the ledge, and he

put up his huge paws to drag himself up. Elsie caught up a loose piece of limestone and dashed it with all her force upon the head of the cub, who relinquished his hold and rolled to the bottom, uttering ferocious cries, and biting and scratching furiously.

The old bears rose at once. Evidently they made up their minds that there had been some unwarrantable force used against their offspring by a person or persons unknown, hidden upon the ledge, and it behooved them as heads of the family to see about it at once. A growling conversation followed, in which the injured cub took the loudest part, and then Elsie could tell by the sounds she heard below that one of the bears had commenced the ascent. Looking down, she saw that the head of the family was coming up, showing his teeth fiercely, and watched in his course by the rest of the family, who, sitting upon their haunches, took a deep interest in the proceedings.

Elsie was about to give up in despair, when she noticed that the ledge upon which she stood was continued along the wall of the cavern, and that it narrowed as it proceeded, until it was only wide enough for a single person, by clinging to the projections above, to keep a footing upon it. Springing up, she began to creep out upon this shelf, holding by the stalactites above her head, and proceeded until another step would have made her footing too precarious. Here she paused, and clinging to a projecting stalactite with one hand, she looked back at the grizzly.

He reached the ledge at which his progeny had come to grief, and began to lift his huge body cautiously, evidently expecting a blow, and prepared to receive it. The blow did not come and he reached the ledge in safety, and looked about for Elsie. Catching sight of her, he uttered a growl of terrible depth, which was answered by his family below, and began to creep out upon the ledge, step by step, and Elsie watched him with fearful interest. Crowding his huge body close to the wall, he reached a place about six feet from her, and here he paused, feeling that he was treading upon dangerous ground, and that another step might set him rolling down to the floor beneath, and he felt a presentiment that it would hurt him to fall so far. Elsie saw this with delight,

and began to hope that, for the present, she was beyond his reach.

Bruin made another step, but withdrew his foot instantly, as he felt that his brawny shoulder pressed too hard against the wall for comfort. Lying down upon the ledge, he extended his huge paw and made an effort to sweep Elsie from the ledge into the waiting jaws of his family below. But, stretch as much as he could, there still remained a distance of two feet between him and the brave-hearted girl.

Most women would have given way in such a position. There lay the huge monster, the foam dropping from his distended jaws, his wicked eyes twinkling with rage, and the long, sharp claws reaching out toward her, and she had not the power to retreat further, but must remain facing him. Bruin was dissatisfied. He felt that an unwarrantable liberty had been taken with a member of his family which required summary vengeance at his hands, and yet he could do nothing. Elsie, seeing that he was helpless to do her harm, began to recover courage, and set about making her position as safe as possible. Taking off her belt she buckled it firmly about the stalactite against which she was leaning, and made a loop in it by which she could hold on more readily, and passed her hand through it, and watched the futile attempts of the bear with inward satisfaction.

It began to be patent to the family below that paterfamilias was not able to carry out the project which he had set out to perform. Their dissatisfied growls made the cavern ring, and lashed the old bear into a perfect fury, and he rose incautiously and made a longer reach toward Elsie. But, in doing so, his shoulder struck hard upon a projecting knob in the limestone, and the next moment he was whirling through the air, turning once before he struck, and alighting upon his head with a tremendous crash. Elsie looked downward and to her delight saw that he did not move, but lay as he had fallen, with his head doubled beneath his shoulder in such a way that she knew his neck was broken. The she-bear approached him in an inquisitive way, patted him with her paw, pushed him, and in various ways tried to attract his attention, but as it became plain that he would rise no more, she uttered such a growl as might have appalled the stoutest

heart. Elsie trembled, but still clung to the strap with all her strength, as she saw the huge monster, after one more ineffectual attempt to arouse her fallen mate, begin to make the ascent of the ledge, gnashing her teeth with rage.

A glance was sufficient to show Elsie that the she-bear was not so large as her slain mate, and that she could advance further upon the ledge than he could possibly have done. Hastily removing the strap, she bound it upon a ragged stalactite two feet further on, and clinging to this, she managed to get that much further along the ledge, and not a moment too soon, for her huge enemy was approaching, uttering blood-curdling growls and intent upon taking vengeance upon the person who she thought had slain her mate. She reached a point from which she could advance no further, and Elsie hoped that she might share the fate of her mate. But, even in her rage, the she-bear seemed conscious of this, and after several ineffectual but cautious attempts to reach Elsie, during which her claws were within six inches of the besieged girl, she retreated backward along the ledge until reaching a wider place, and lay down upon the rocks watching Elsie with an unwavering malignity which was terrible. The position in which she now stood was painful, and Elsie returned to the spot where she had been standing when the dead bear fell, where she could rest both feet with ease. Once or twice the bear advanced and drove her back to her old position, but the moment the enemy retreated she came back again, leaning against the stalactite.

She was getting weary. An unusual strength had supported her up to this time, but she felt that it was giving way. Fearing the worst, she took off her Zowave jacket and tore it into strips and formed a sort of rope which she fastened to the stalactite in such a way as to give her additional support. The bear remained in the same position, gazing at her with bloodshot eyes, and it was evident did not intend to go away. Elsie prayed fervently, while clinging to her frail support, for strength to sustain her in the trying hour. Should she cast herself down and take that death rather than the fearful one which stared her in the face? She felt herself sinking, life and sense were fleeting fast, when she heard a cry of surprise, and Wild Nat appeared in the door.

way of the cavern. The unhurt cub sprung at him, and was pierced to the heart by his long spear, and the she-bear launched herself from rock to rock toward this new intruder. Elsie ran hastily to the ledge just vacated by her enemy, and sunk fainting upon the rocks.

CHAPTER XI.

N. H. 1832.

The followers of Melvin had scattered everywhere in pursuit of Elsie, need we say, without result. Several of them had passed the mouth of the bear's den, but knowing what purpose it was likely to serve, had not thought proper to improve a dangerous acquaintance. The idea that Elsie could by any possibility have taken shelter there had never entered their minds.

Melvin was in a fury, for all his plans had been set at naught by this unlucky *contretemps*. He had joined in the pursuit, and had done his best to recover her, but as the night progressed and no signs of the girl could be found, he called in his scattered bands, fearing an attack from Elbert Spencer, and made a camp again a quarter of a mile nearer the chasm in which Elsie was besieged by the bears, determined to search for her in the morning and never give up the pursuit until she had been recovered. He lay down in no very good humor, and was greeted next morning by a very unpleasant revelation. Long-armed Dan, by long practice, had acquired considerable skill in untying knots with his feet and he had used his skill to very good purpose during the night, and had made his way out of the camp, unseen by his guards, and was gone.

"A thousand curses follow him!" hissed Melvin. "If I am ever betrayed, it will be through the stupidity of the men who follow me. Now of course the Long armed rascal will bring his friends down upon us, and we shall lose some more men, but I'll be cursed if I leave this place until I have found Elsie Veddor."

"That girl will be your destruction yet, Curt," said Hank Wilson. "It would be better for you if you had never seen her."

"You speak truly, Hank," replied Melvin, morosely, "but it is the curse of my life that I can not forget her, and, much as she despises me, I must love her still. How in the name of all the fiends did you suffer this Dan to escape? He will give us great trouble when he gets with Wild Nat again."

"Let me once get where I can draw a bead on that wild madman and he at least will never trouble us more."

"You can't kill him," said Melvin, hoarsely. "Curse him, he is bullet-proof, for I have tried him half a dozen times, and know that I'm not a poor shot."

"You are afraid of him, Curt, and I am not," said Wilson. "Don't say that you are not afraid of him, for you know that you are."

"I have not denied it, Hank. He is the only being on earth I really do fear, I tell you. If it were not for this cursed prophecy the men of Negara would not be so few."

The men were standing on the outskirts of the camp while they conversed. All at once Hank uttered a delighted cry, and springing to a rock picked off a fluttering fragment of cloth and held it up before his leader.

"A piece of her dress," cried Melvin, eagerly. "She has gone through this pass, then, as I live."

"If she has, she can't get out," said Wilson. "It's a perfect *cul de sac*, and only runs about a mile up. We've got her, as sure as you live. Probably she was hiding somewhere when it was so dark we couldn't find her."

They passed by the bears' den, and heard the growls of the infuriated animals; but had no wish for a closer acquaintance. The whole party scattered here and there in search, but saw nothing of Elsie. Reaching the end of the pass, they turned back, and were searching up and down among the rocks, when they heard the cry of surprise which Nat uttered, when he saw Elsie in the cave.

"Nat is there," cried Melvin. "Oh, my God, Elsie is there, too, and the bears are attacking them. Who is man enough to follow me?"

Not a man stirred, for of all things created, the mountain-man and the Indian fear "Old Eph."

"Give me your knife, then," hissed Curtis Melvin. "I will go alone."

He snatched a heavy bowie from the sheath at the side of Wilson, and leaped down into the cave, holding a revolver ready. As he pushed into the cave, he saw the she-bear leap from a shelf eight feet above upon the head of Wild Nat, whose spear was driven through her body with such force that the steel point protruded a foot from her back. Nat however, was crushed down by the falling body, and Melvin, running up, fired four chambers from his revolver into the broad ear of the bear, and uttered a shout of triumph as the muscular limbs contracted for the last time.

At the shout a dozen of his men sprung into the cave, and looked with dilated eyes at the wild scene about them.

"Get some lariats and tie that fellow," said Melvin. "Tie him tight, beyond the possibility of escape. Our luck is coming back to us, I think, for I would sooner have this man than a hundred Long-armed Dans. Get a torch, some one, - for I don't see any thing of Elsie."

"Perhaps she isn't here," said Hank. "Or perhaps the bear—"

"No, no. It can not be," gasped Melvin. "I will not believe that she, so young, so pure, so beautiful, has perished by such a horrible death."

"It may be," replied Wilson. "Nerve yourself to bear the worst that can come to you."

"Torches, torches," shrieked the unhappy man. "Four of you stay and take care of the prisoner, and the rest come with me."

They had not far to go, for the cave narrowed as they advanced, until it ended in a yawning chasm which seemed to be of unfathomable depth. One of the men threw in a stone, and as he did so they listened, and after some seconds, heard it strike far below.

"Deep enough," said Hank. "It can't be that she ran from the bears and fell down here."

"I could kill you for the thought," cried Melvin, hoarsely. "If I have driven her to death, I will kill myself."

A shout from the Indians they had left in charge of the insensible form of Wild Nat called them back. They ran to the place, and one of the savages pointed to the shelf above, where they could see a corner of a skirt hanging over the rocks. Melvin sprung up the rugged side of the cavern, and his cry of joy rung through it a moment after, and he descended, carrying the insensible form of Elsie in his arms.

"I've got her," he cried, eagerly. "I don't think she hurt, either. Have you got any liquor, Hank?"

Wilson gave him a flask, and he poured a little of the contents into his hand, and applied it to the nostrils of the senseless girl, and put a little on her lurid lips.

"That's right," said Hank. "Her color is coming back, and she will be all right in a moment."

"What is all this?" cried a voice. "What am I doing here? Ha! Curtis Melvin, is it you, dog that you are? Give me back my wife and child!"

The voice was that of Wild Nat, but he was no longer mad! At a glance it was plain that he was no longer insane.

A shock had given him back that which a shock had taken away!

"Who are you?" faltered Melvin. "What do you ask of me?"

"You would know who I am, villain?" cried Nat. "Part this strange covering on my breast, and let him look at it."

They pushed aside the hairy covering on his breast, and there, printed with indelible ink, they read the letters:

"N. H. 1832."

Melvin recoiled as if he had been struck by lightning, and a terrible look came into his face.

"You here?" he cried. "You, Wild Nat, the Terror of the Gulch?"

"Yes, it is I, bloodthirsty villain—I and no other. What am I doing here? What place is this?"

"Stand back, all of you, and let me talk to this man. Drive them all out, Hank, and watch the entrance."

The lesser villain obeyed the order, and the two were alone in the cave.

Wild Nat regarded Melvin with a strange stare, and it seemed that his bewildered mind was striving to regain what it had lost.

"You know me, then, Nathan?" said Melvin. "I did not think it possible, after fifteen years."

"Know you? Of course I do! I should know you anywhere, and in any disguise. You have worked too much evil to me and mine to be able to forget you."

"Do you remember all the past?"

"I remember your treachery, to say the least," said Wild Nat, writhing in his bonds. "I ask you again, why am I here, and bound in this way?"

"Does your memory retain nothing of the past fifteen years?"

"Fifteen years? What do you mean, man? It is not so long as that; it was only yesterday when you did that great wrong. And yet this strange dress, this savage place—I do not understand. Where is my wife, you dog? Give her back to me!"

"Your wife?" said Melvin, hoarsely. "I can not give you back the dead. She was killed that night."

"Killed! Ha, say you so, black-hearted villain? I remember now—I remember all. I am Wild Nat, the Terror of the Gulch—Wild Nat, of the Quartz Ranges—Wild Nat, the Demon of the Hills, and I am mad, mad! Release me, you black dog! Why am I tied up, like a thief?"

He was mad again, and Melvin saw it with a sort of pang, but, at the same time, a terrible thought passed through his brain. It was better that this man should die at once, for while he lived there was no safety for him.

"Look you, Wild Nat," he said. "For years you have followed me like a shadow, and have always had the best of every encounter. Now the turn is mine, and you have a very short time to live. I am going to have you killed to make myself safe."

"You can not kill *me*!" replied Nat, hoarsely. "Death has been turned away from me so often that I know that I can not die until my work is done. You are a fool to think of it."

"Yet, though you have done me so much injury, I can not

find it in my heart to kill you. There is one whose life, by a prophecy, depends upon your fate, and I have promised to give you up to him. That man is Negara, the Blackfoot chief."

Upon hearing this Nat uttered such a shout of laughter that the walls of the cave echoed back the sound.

"Negara? Ha! ha! ha! Does he think to elude me, me who have watched him so long? Curt Melvin and Negara; Negara and Curt Melvin! You are going to give me up to him because *you* can not find it in your heart to kill me?"

"Yes; why do you laugh, fool?"

"At my own thought," replied Nat. "There—go away, and send Negara to kill me. He is not very far away, you know."

"I was right, Nat," said Melvin. "You know too much for your own good, and I must see that you trouble me no more."

He left Nat uttering his shouts of laughter, lying upon his back in the cavern, and climbed out of the dismal place. Here he found Elsie, supported by Hank Wilson, just recovering from her swooning fit.

"You are better, I hope," he said, bending over her and making a signal to Hank to fall back, while he supported her head. "You are not hurt, thank Heaven."

"Do not profane that holy name, Curtis Melvin," said Elsie. "It is the will of God that I should fall again into your hands, and I bow to His will."

"You were wrong to fly from me," said Melvin.

"Wrong? I am almost sorry that my life has been saved, if you are to be my keeper. Do not touch me, sir; your very touch is pollution."

"Perhaps Negara will suit you better," he said. "I have told you that there are but these two courses open for you—to accept me as your husband or go into the lodge of the chief. One or the other you must do."

"I can at least die," she answered, proudly.

"If the opportunity is given you to do so, I doubt if you would take advantage of it. Most people cling to life, no matter how sad that life may be. I am going away to con-

coct plans for the destruction of Spencer's brigade of trappers, and Negara will resume command of this force. You will be his prisoner, and as such shall have an opportunity to decide between us."

"Go, if you will," she said, coldly. "But, before you go, tell me what you are to do with that poor man whom I hear shouting in the cave?"

"I have given him to Negara, to do with as he will," replied Melvin. "If you have any appeal to make, let it be made to him when he comes, although I can tell you now that nothing can save him."

"Why? What evil has the poor man done?"

"I have no time to explain. Wilson, you will take charge of this lady. As for the madman, let him remain in the cave, and set a strong guard over it, so that he can not escape. When Negara comes you know what to tell him."

Wilson nodded, with a queer smile, and, whistling up a horse, Melvin mounted and rode away, leaving Wilson in charge of the imprisoned girl.

"I hope you won't try to escape again, my lady, for I don't want to use you roughly. Hank Wilson is a lady's man, and it goes to his heart to be rough with a lady. Promise to keep quiet and I won't tie you."

"I promise," said Elsie, wearily. "I am too weak to make any attempt at escape."

"That's right, my lady-bird. Don't try it, and it will be all right."

An hour passed and the shouts of Nat in the cave were still continued. The Indians had dragged out the bodies of the bears and were cutting them up and preparing the flesh for curing, and some of the men lighted fires and indulged in some savory steaks of bear-meat, which the border-men delighted in, from its rarity. The clatter of hoofs was heard and Negara, in all the finery of the Indian warrior, rode up accompanied by twenty mounted Blackfeet. Wilson started up and met him, and they drew to one side and engaged in an animated conversation. The Indian spoke vehemently, waving his hand now toward the cave and then toward Elsie, and Wilson replied in the same tone. After a talk of some mo-

ments Negara dismounted and came forward to ~~sp~~ where Elsie sat, and saluted her with a lofty gesture, such as only an Indian warrior is capable of making.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LEAP IN THE DARK.

"SILVER STAR," he said, "the white man, who is the friend of Negara, has sung a sweet song in my ears. He has said, 'The white maiden who is so fair to look upon will not come into my lodge. Go to her, and try if the chief of the Blackfeet may find favor in her eyes.'"

"The white man who is the friend of Negara is an enemy to me," she answered.

"He would not be an enemy to the Silver Star," said the chief. "What has he done, that the white maiden will not look with favor upon him?"

"His hands are red with innocent blood, chief," she answered.

"Blood must be shed," said Negara, proudly. "I myself have shed much, as becomes a brave warrior, but I have lost some of my own with it."

"That was in battle, chief."

"Silver Star says well. A chief of the Great Nation should not shed any but the blood of men. Listen to the words of Negara. There is a warm lodge in the Blackfoot village and a bright fire always lighted. It is the home of Negara, and he lives there alone. It is not good that it is so, and Negara would change it. Will Silver Star come into the lodge and keep the fire bright?"

"Chief," she said, "you ask more than you have a right to demand. Doubtless there are many in the Blackfoot village who would gladly be the wife of Negara, for they are of Indian blood. But, I am a white woman, and can only marry one of my own race."

"It is well spoken," said Negara. "Look! Half the

blood which flows in these veins is the blood of the whites. The other half comes from the blood of the great Sioux tribe. Let Silver Star marry a chief who has the blood of her nation in his veins."

She shook her head, and the face of the chief, which had hitherto been persuasive and bland, began to change.

"The white girl is very proud," he said. "Does she know that she speaks to one who can *command* her to be his wife?"

"Never! you may command, but I would die before I would submit to you."

"Let the white girl think it over," said the chief. "There is only one way, and if she is obstinate, a fire may be kindled which will consume her. Why does Wild Nat cry out so loudly? His mouth should be stopped since he interrupts the talk of a chief."

"What will you do with him, chief?" demanded Elsie.

"He is to die," said Negara. "A prophet has spoken in the ears of Negara and commanded him to do it."

"Dare you touch him? Remember that your laws forbid you to injure a madman."

"He has shed the blood of warriors, and no law can save him. Let the white girl stand back until a chief calls for her again."

Full of fears for poor Nat, she stepped back, and Wilson, in a sort of careless manner, came near her, and it was easy to see that his business was to keep a watch upon her movements. Negara, calling to his aid four of the most ferocious Indians in the band, descended the sloping entrance to the den, where he found Nat lying upon his back, laughing wildly.

"Ha! ha! ha! Here he is! Curt Melvin sent him to kill me. Hurrah!"

"Silence!" said the chief. "You are about to pass across the silent river, but I am a chief of the Blackfeet, and you shall say how you will die."

"Untie my feet," said Nat, stopping his wild laughter. "You are kinder than I thought."

The Indians armed with rifles raised them ready to fire, while the chief stepped forward, cut the cords upon the

limbs of Nat, and moved back, as the madman rose slowly to his feet.

"You said I could choose how to die?" he said.

"The word of a chief is sacred," replied Negara. "As you say, so shall it be."

"My blood shall not be upon your hands, for the Blackfeet will point at you and say, 'This man murdered a creature upon whom the finger of the Great Spirit had been laid.' I will kill myself if you will let me."

"Be it so!" said Negara, eagerly, and evidently relieved to be free from the odium of this murder. "Choose your death."

"Follow me," replied Nat, "all of you."

They paced slowly on, some ten paces behind the madman, and saw him pause upon the brink of the deep chasm which has been mentioned. A sort of steam rose from it, like the reek of a cauldron, and Nat pointed downward in silence, and the chief understood him.

"You will throw yourself into this place?" said Negara, "and so save your scalp?"

Nat nodded in silence, and waving the Indians back, knelt upon the brink of the place which was to be his grave. Those who saw his face thought that never had they seen any thing so majestic. The Indians stood trembling, their nervous hands scarcely able to hold their weapons, watching the kneeling man. His eyes were upraised, and a beautiful expression passed over his face. Negara, the man least likely to be moved of all his band, turned away his head, for he could not look upon that face and doom him to death. At last Nat raised his head and came slowly to his feet.

"Negara," he said, in a solemn voice. The Indian started and turned suddenly toward him.

"I am about to die, Indian," said the strange man, in a voice which had no touch of madness in it. "And I summon you to meet me, before to-morrow's sun shall set, at the judgment."

"Do it!" cried Negara, fiercely. "Go down, or the rifles shall speak."

"I am going," replied Nat, calmly. "Do not hurry a man who must die."

He looked once about the cave, once down into the awful depth, and then leaped boldly out, and was gone. The Indians ran to the mouth of the opening and looked down, but could see nothing. All was veiled in gloom, and Nat was gone.

Negara came out of that dismal place an altered man. A gloom, which could never be removed until death called him, was settled upon his savage face. His eyes were stony, and he started at every sound which came from the hills. Wilson approached him and whispered in an awe-struck voice :

"Is it done?"

"It is done," replied Negara. "He will never trouble us more, and I have made the words of the Spotted Cat a lie. And now to keep the oath which I swore, to never give up the pursuit of the white men. Let us go."

"What shall we do with the prisoner?" said Wilson.

"Let her ride by me," replied the chief. "I will speak to her."

He had no need to call her, for Elsie came forward, with a look of detestation on her face.

"You are a murderer, chief," she cried. "You are guilty of the death of a man who was not accountable for wrong."

"The Silver Star has a long tongue," he said, fiercely. "No hand was laid upon him, but he died by his own act."

"Where is he?"

"Look for him at the bottom of the pit, in yonder cave. There you will find his bones."

"The deed will find you out," she said. "I feel like a prophetess, inspired to tell you that you have not long to live. Beware!"

The chief lifted his hand fiercely, and it seemed as if he was about to strike her, but he restrained himself by a mighty effort of his powerful will, and fell back to his horse, telling Wilson to take charge of her and bring her on.

"It is hard, Miss Vedder," said Wilson; "the worst thing I ever knew him to do; but think it over. He is superstitious, and a Prophet has told him that either he or Wild Nat must die, and this is the result."

"But he was mad. If he killed men he was not to be called to account."

"He had a method in his madness," replied Wilson. "If you noticed it, he took a peculiar delight in wiping out our men, and it's no more than fair that he should go under. The chief is not so much to blame, and certainly Curt did all he could when he went away and left him to Negara."

"Great mercy that. He knew that the chief would not spare him, or he would never have given him up."

"I see it ain't much use trying to talk with you," said Frank. "Let us move on."

He helped her to the saddle, and they rode on after the band, who were already in motion. By the addition of the twenty brought by Negara, they now numbered seventy, enough, at least, to meet the brigade with a good chance of success, although it was against the advice of Wilson, who had tried to reason with the chief without effect.

The chief rode at the head, and Wilson, with Elsie, was in the rear, when a loud word of command was heard, and a close fire was poured into the Indians from both sides of the pass. So sudden and terrible was the shock that the head of the column was swept away, leaving the chief almost alone. Seeing this, he wheeled his horse and darted back in such a way that to fire at him was to endanger Elsie, who was with that section of the savage band who had been untouched by the fire.

"No more, no more!" cried the voice of Elbert Spencer. "Fire not another shot lest you kill her. Forward, all."

There was a mad rush of men and horses, and the narrow pass at once became a scene of the utmost confusion.

Before the savages had time to recover from their first panic, the brigade was upon them, cutting right and left with their bowies. Negara and Wilson, throwing themselves in front, sustained the fight with a gallantry worthy of a better cause but they were struggling with desperate men, who did not know what it was to be beaten. Back, back, step by step contesting every inch of ground, and staining it with their flowing blood, went the band of Negara.

Two of the immediate adherents of the chief, obeying an order which he shouted to them, had seized Elsie and rapidly conveyed her to the rear, where she would be out of danger. It was a generous act, and yet the most unfortunate thing that

could have happened for the Indians. Up to this time the brigade had refrained from using that terrible weapon, the revolver, fearing to do some injury to Elsie, but as they saw her move away, a stunning cheer ran through their ranks.

"Revolvers, boys!" cried Elbert. "Give it to the bloody dogs."

A hailstorm of bullets began to rattle through the rapidly-thinning ranks of the Indians, and they fell back more quickly, and some of the weak-kneed ones began to clamber up the rocks in various directions, leaving their more stout-hearted companions to bear the brunt of the combat alone. Looking about him in a lull in the combat, the chief saw that of his entire band scarcely twenty backed him, the rest having either fled or fallen by the weapons of the white men.

The appearance of the chief was fearful. His left arm had been broken by a ball from a revolver, and hung useless at his side, but his right wielded a ponderous ax with deadly effect. Another ball had grazed his temple, and the blood was running down his face. In two or three other places his garments were stained with blood from wounds of lesser importance. But, in spite of this, he fought gallantly, and encouraged his failing men, who were falling one by one under the deadly weapons of the brigade.

"Yield, Negara, yield!" cried Elbert, as he struggled to get near the chief, "and by heaven you shall have quarter, if you have not harmed Elsie or Wild Nat!"

"Look for Wild Nat under the earth," cried Negara. "I ask no mercy at your hands, nor will I take any. Strike on!"

At this moment Wilson, who had raised his arm to strike down Long armed Dan, who was approaching him, received his bullet below the arm-pit. The powerful arm dropped to his side, a vacant look passed over his face, and like a giant tree felled by the stroke of the ax-man, he came crashing to the earth.

Negara saw that his last hope was gone, for in this desperate man he had confided more than any other, and to the last had some little hope that their united prowess might be able to bear back the tide of their enemies. The brigade

made a single rush, and the scanty remnant of the defenders began to fall back rapidly, still dealing desperate blows. Negara whispered a quick word in the ear of a gigantic Indian who fought at his right hand, and with a heroic devotion very seldom equaled, he reined his horse between his chief and the weapons of Dan and Elbert, who were rushing to assail the chief.

Negara forced his way through the ranks of his own men, and goading his horse with the edge of his hatchet, bounded away. Something in his eyes, as he did this, warned Elbert that this was not a coward's flight, but some desperate expedient, and that they must sweep the few remaining enemies out of their path and follow at once. They were only ten in number, but those ten stood up for three minutes against three times their force, impeding their onward course. One by one they dropped, and at last a mad rush was made, and the last Indian went down before the bowie of Elbert Spencer.

"Forward, for heaven's sake, Dan!" cried the young man. "There is no telling what he may do."

Scoring their horses' flanks with their knives, the brigade dashed on, in time to see the chief disappearing around an angle in the path, carrying Elsie before him, apparently senseless.

CHAPTER X

A STRANGE REUNION.

"AFTER him!" cried Elbert. "The man is desperate and may harm her. Do not spare your horses."

Even while he spoke, the horse he rode sprung madly forward, as the keen point of a bowie pierced his flank. Long-armed Dan was not far behind, and the brigade followed, according to the speed of their horses.

"He kain't go fur," said Dan, as by a desperate effort he brought his horse level with that of Elbert. "The pass ends a mile furder on."

They now had the enemy in full view, and saw that he wavered in his saddle, and that the stones over which they were riding were spotted with the blood which dropped from his many wounds. He pulled up at the entrance to the bears' den, and leaped out of the saddle, still carrying Elsie in his arms, and the next instant he was out of sight in the black depths. They ran to the entrance and looked down, and saw him walking with uneven steps over the stone floor, still carrying the insensible form of Elsie. What did he mean to do?

Elbert and Dan were quickly in the cave, and would have shot him down, but he carried the poor girl in such a way that it was impossible to fire without a chance of injuring her. Upon the brink of the pit into which Wild Nat had plunged he paused and faced them, holding the girl in a firm clasp.

"Take care what you do," he said. "You see what is behind me, and if you shoot me, I fall into the pit, and she goes with me."

The voice was no longer that of Negara, the chief, but the oily, silken tones of Curtis Melvin, and both cried out his name together in tones of execration.

"Yes, the man you have hounded and hunted to his death, Negara, the Blackfoot chief, is Curtis Melvin," he said. "You know me—beware what you do."

"As I hope to be saved, Curtis Melvin," cried Elbert, in agonized tones, "if you will give her up to us, not I, nor any one of my men, shall lift a hand against you."

"Ay, you do well to promise that now—now when I am hurt to death, and can have but a few minutes to live. I must die, but before I go I will take a revenge which you will remember through your life. You asked me, not long ago, to spare Wild Nat, the Gulch Terror. I will tell you now why that is impossible, if you would like to know."

"Where is he?"

"You see this dark cavity at my feet? He plunged into this an hour ago, and the darkness swallowed him up. That was a fitting end for him."

"You murdered him."

"He leaped down of his own accord, I tell you. Be care

ful, Dan ; if you fire at me, I go down after him, and your lady goes with me. A-ha ! I think I have you now."

"Have some mercy," pleaded Elbert. "I will give my life for her sake."

"Your life ? What is your life to me ? No, you may rather live and think of me and my revenge."

"Melvin, think before you do an act which will consign you to an endless perdition."

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" he laughed, wildly. "As if I cared for that, with so many crimes upon my soul. No, no, she goes down with me, and you shall see it done."

Elsie began to struggle a little, and stretched out her hands imploringly for help. He only clutched her more firmly, and cried out to them to witness that they drove him to this.

"Oh, mercy," screamed Elsie. "Do not kill me, Melvin ; do not doom me to this horrible death."

"It is something," cried the unhappy man, staggering from weakness—"something at least to hear you beg for mercy at my hands, but I do not know the word. No, no, come down with me into the black depths. We shall rest well together in the caverns under the earth."

The man was mad, let us hope. He must have been or he could not have resisted those appealing hands and the beautiful face uplifted to his. Elbert, seeing that he was in earnest and that in another moment they must go down into the depths together, sprung madly forward to tear her from his grasp, but they were tottering upon the brink of the chasm when he saw Melvin stagger back with a cry of horror, and half release his grasp upon Elsie.

Out of the dismal depths of the pit rose the form of Wild Nat, as we have seen him before, the water dropping from his long hair and beard, and from his covering of skins. His hand grasped the terrible spear with which he had done such fearful work, and a savage look passed over his face, a look of demoniac triumph, and he sprung at the throat of Melvin with a yell which was full of triumphant malice.

"Back, back !" shrieked Melvin. "Down to death, black phantom. Why do you haunt me now that my hour is come ?"

"The prophecy, the prophecy!" was the reply. "Give me back my wife!"

The next moment they were locked in a deadly grapple. The excitement of the moment lent Curtis Melvin unnatural strength, and he fought like a tiger. But, what could any ordinary man's strength avail against the mighty power of Wild Nat in the hour of his triumph? The form of Melvin was whirled shrieking into the air, and sent crashing down into the pit, and they heard his body strike with a dull sound against the rocky sides as he descended. Wild Nat reeled backward, covered his face with his hands, and fell senseless to the earth beside the girl whom he had saved from death. Elbert sprung forward and caught at Elsie and carried her away from the dangerous vicinity, and Dan dragged away Wild Nat, and then ran to the mouth of the cave.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Come down here, half a hundred of you, and help us out of this. Glory to Gideon, if this ain't bully! I kin outfight any thing in Oregon, by gracious! Come down, you fightin' angels; come down, you imps of Satan, and help me yell."

The cave was quickly filled with a motley group, many of them bleeding and all wild with excitement, and by their help both Elsie and Wild Nat were lifted from the cave and carried up into the sunlight. Elsie soon recovered, and, sitting by her lover's side with her hand in his, told of the pangs she had endured since she had fallen into the hands of Curtis Melvin.

Wild Nat lay as one dead, only the heaving of his broad breast telling that he still lived. The doctor pushed them all back and took him in charge.

"This is an extraordinary case of syncope," he said. "Keep back all of you and let me work."

Doctor Sabin was a skillful man, and only his great love for Nature and science had led him to take a part in these wild scenes. His method of practice, however, was at fault here, and for two hours he worked over the strange being, and still he lay in the same death-like sleep. At last his nostrils began to twitch and he moved uneasily, and then, stretching his giant limbs, sat up and looked wildly about him.

"Why, what is all this?" he said, in a wandering tone.
"Where am I now?"

"No matter about that," replied Sabin, pushing Dan back as he would have spoken. "You have been sick and I am your surgeon, and I forbid talking."

"I think you are right, doctor," he said, fingering his long beard reflectively. "Yes, you must be right. Why, my hair and beard are grown out of all reason, and I think I should be better for a good cutting."

"Let me be your barber," said the doctor, taking a pair of shears from his case, and setting to work industriously. In ten minutes most of the superabundant hair and beard which had so long disfigured him were gone, and he sat before them, a gigantic but remarkably handsome man, perhaps forty years of age. The doctor had seated him in such a way that he could not see either Elbert or Elsie, and telling him to be quiet he went and whispered something in her ear. She arose and stepped quietly out of sight behind the projecting rocks, and the doctor came back and sat down near him.

"You have been light-headed during your illness, my dear sir," said he, "and I wish to see how far your cure is effected. Will you allow me to look at your eye?"

Wild Nat assented by a nod, and the doctor pushed back the eyelid with his finger and looked into his eye, and turned away with a satisfied air.

"Now, sir, can you recall past events? In the first place, what is your name?"

"Nathan Houston. Why do you ask that?"

"Never mind now. Think over the past and tell me what you think proper.

"I was an engineer and land-surveyor in St. Louis, and started out with a party to cross the plains to one of the forts. The Indians were quiet and I allowed my wife and little daughter to go with me, as I was to be stationed at the fort for some time. We were attacked by Indians, headed by a young man, claiming to be a white man, but as some said with Indian blood in his veins, and the whole party was cut off. I remember being struck upon the head with a hatchet, and after that it is a blank to me."

"Do you know the name of the white leader of whom you speak?"

"I can tell you that, too. He came into the camp an hour before the attack and was kindly received, giving his name as Curtis Melvin. Yet I am ready to make oath he led the attack, although disguised as an Indian."

"And were all slain?"

"All, all! My dear wife, my angel child, the brave men who were with me, not one was spared. I shall live long enough to find this Melvin and kill him, and after that I am ready to die."

At this moment Elsie, obeying a preconcerted sign from the doctor, came out of her place of concealment and noiselessly advanced, and suddenly faced Nathan Houston. He sprung to his feet, looking at her in vague wonder and doubt.

"Rosalie! my wife!" he whispered. "Ah, no, that can not be! Who is this, doctor? Speak, before I go wild."

"Do you see any thing familiar in her face?"

"The image of my wife as she was when I first knew and loved her."

"This girl, then," said the doctor, slowly, "was saved from such a massacre as you have described by an old guide, Peter Vedder."

"Then she is mine!" cried Houston, clasping her to his heart, and raining kisses upon her upturned face. "My God, I thank thee that this has been given me to soothe my wounded heart."

The meeting is too holy for my pen. Let us drop a veil upon their joy.

They descended the smoking pit in the bear's den next day, and understood how it was that Houston had been saved from death when he leaped into it. Twenty feet from the verge it was full of water, almost hot, causing the steam which hid the depths from view. And there, floating upon the tepid surface, they found the body of Curtis Melvin, whom they had known as Negara. They raised the body and interred it in the pass, with the bodies of his companions.

On the march to the fort, Elsie told her father what she had known of the man. In one of the forts where she had passed two years of her life, she had met him, under another name, and he had made many friends, but as they afterward heard, he had come with intention of betraying parties who went out into the Indian country. They had loved and were to have been married, had not a man who had suffered through the treachery of Melvin come into the fort and accused him. In the struggle which ensued, the man was stabbed to the heart, and Melvin, after being condemned for the crime, managed to make his escape, and she had not seen him since that time until they met in the camp of the brigade.

The fort was reached in safety, and Peter Vedder received his adopted daughter joyfully, and although he was grieved to lose her forever, his love for her was too real not to make him rejoice in the recovery of the parent, lost so many years, and so providentially restored.

Six weeks after their return, Elbert and Elsie were made man and wife, and the young man resigned his position under the Company, and went with his father-in law to California, where he had a large property, which was recovered after some little trouble, as the deeds were in safe hands. Long-armed Dan and his associates bade adieu to them with heartfelt sorrow, but they were wedded to their border life and would not leave it.

Nathan Houston is now one of the most prominent public men in the middle district of the Golden State, and Elbert is in the State legislature and rising rapidly. Houston remembers his fifteen years of madness only as a fitful dream, and lives only for his daughter and her children. His years of sorrow are having their reward.

THE END

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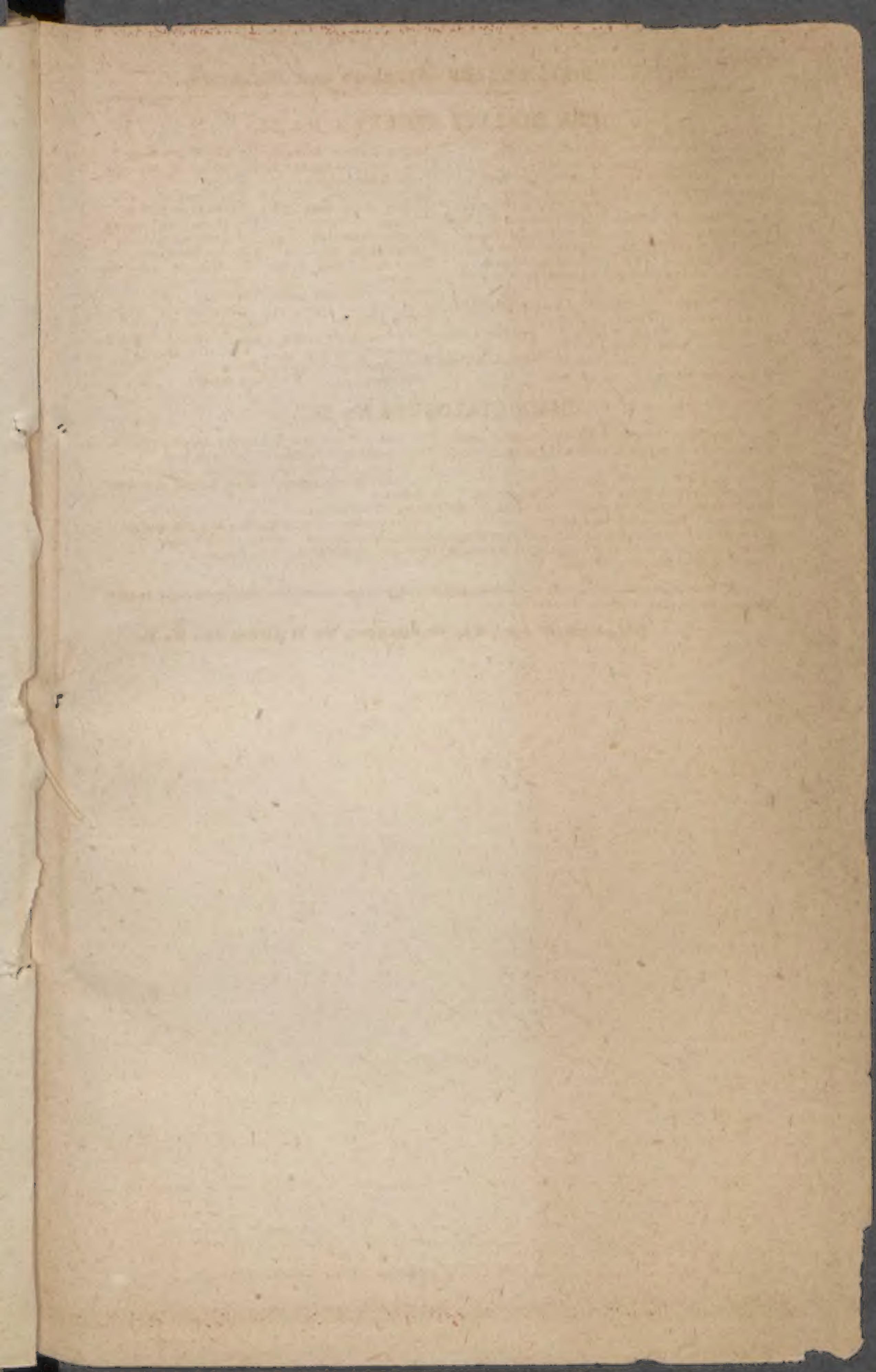
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